

## ATOMIC MURDER

ALSO BY LEONARD GRIBBLE

THE TERRACE SUICIDE MYSTERY  
THE CASE OF THE MARSDEN RUBIES  
THE GRAND MODENA MURDER  
IS THIS REVENGE?  
THE STOLEN HOME SECRETARY  
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HEROES OF THE FIGHTING R. A. F.  
EPICS OF THE FIGHTING R. A. F.  
HEROES OF THE MERCHANT NAVY  
TOY FOLK AND NURSERY PEOPLE

# ATOMIC MURDER

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By LEONARD GRIBBLE

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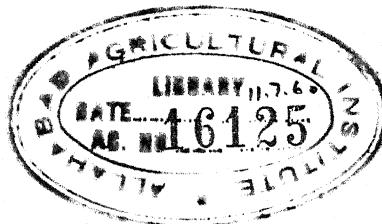
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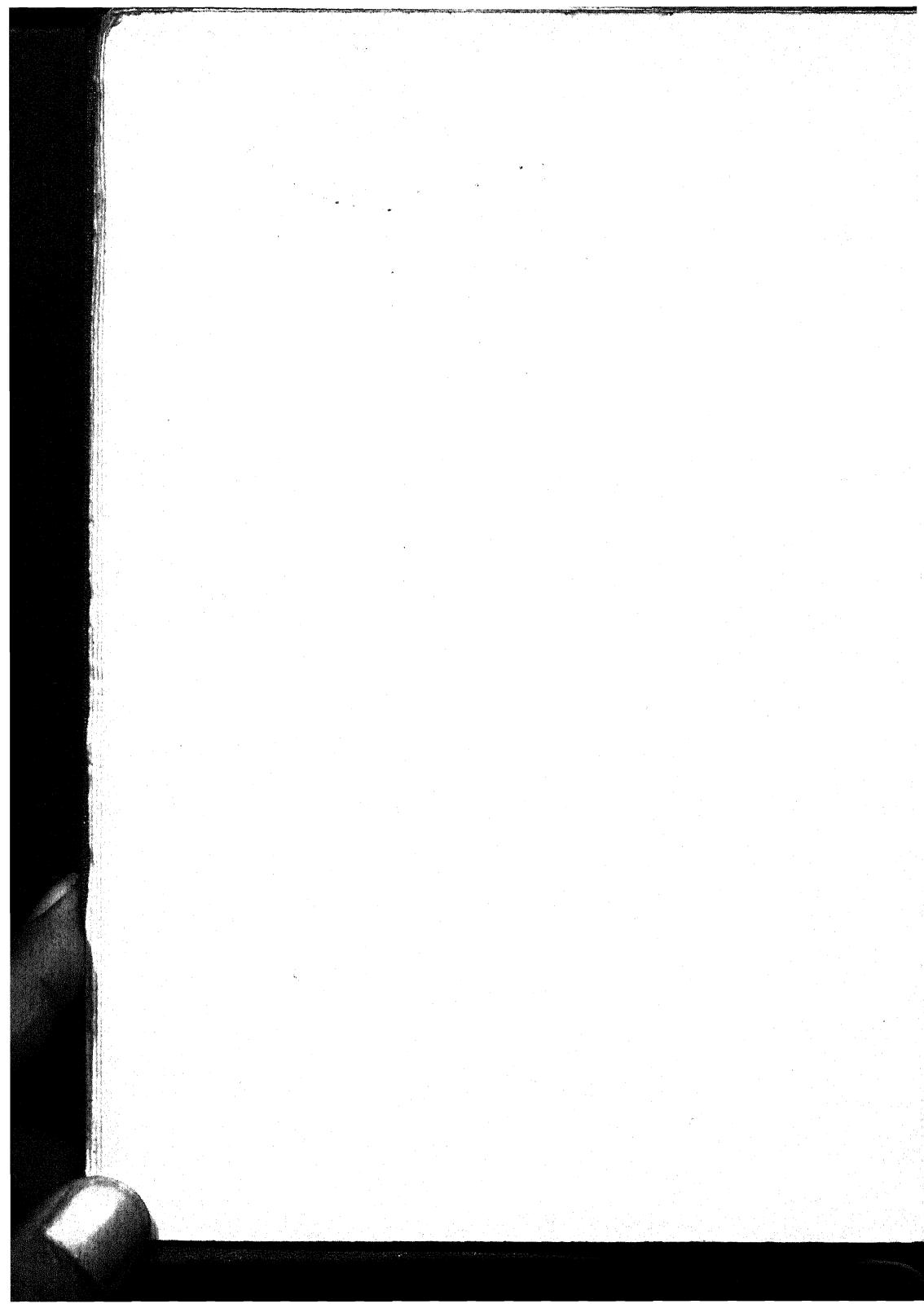


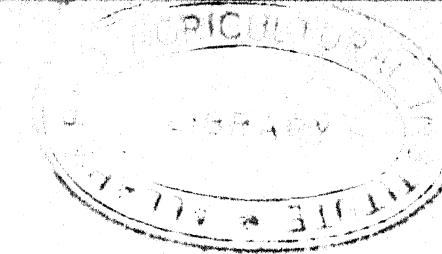
To  
B. J. AYERS  
who is responsible for one  
development of the plot



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## CHAPTER I

### VIOLENCE IN MOONBY STREET

A LARGE DARK CAR OF American make drew up beside a lamp post in Moonby Street, one of the quieter thoroughfares of Mayfair. The man at the wheel got out, locked the doors, and after a quick glance up and down the street approached a doorway and took a bunch of keys from his pocket. He let himself into the house, and for the moment it took him to extricate his key from the lock the light from a hall lamp shone full on his face. His lined features were those of a man in late middle age, a man who had faced many difficulties and much trouble — and overcome them.

He closed the door and mounted the flight of stairs at the end of the narrow hall. He moved as one familiar with his surroundings, and on reaching the landing he at once crossed to a door on the left and opened it.

The room revealed was for the most part in shadow. The only light came from a fire crackling in the grate. In a comfortable wing-chair drawn close to the bright hearth sat a woman with her chin sunk in one hand. At sound of the man's entrance she roused herself and looked around.

"Is that you, Philip?" she asked, and a thread of excitement colored her musical voice.

"Yes, dear. I'm late, but I was detained."

The man came forward, divested himself of his coat and gloves, and sat down in the other wing-chair.

"After I phoned you," he added, "a new conference was sprung on me. It's been nothing but conferences this past week

or two. Conferences and new decisions. It seems we've won a war only to fill the world with distrust of one another and—" He broke off, and when he continued there was an almost boyish penitent note in his voice. "Forgive me, Lottie darling, if I start spouting at you, but I'm full of our new plans for maintaining atomic supremacy. I came here to relax and talk about . . . our son."

The pause before the last word was very marked. He sat forward in his chair.

"You've given Betty the night off, I take it?"

The woman nodded and smiled at him, a slow, rather charming smile that somehow suited her oval features. She stretched out a hand and pressed a switch, and soft lamplight shone on their heads. He saw the tiny touches of gray in her carefully dressed hair. Much of her youthful beauty remained, however, and there was something essentially young—spiritually young—about the gleam that lived in the depths of her fine dark eyes. Thirty years before, Lottie Desmond's eyes had been the toast of numberless young officers in khaki who had applauded her night after night during her appearance in the record London run of *The Great Red Dawn* at the Albany Theatre.

"You mentioned Peter. You've news of him, then?"

She sat forward, clasping her knees with locked fingers. The light touched her cheek bones, emphasizing subtly the fine line of her face and the arch of her neck. The man watched her for some seconds.

"Yes," he said. "I've heard of him. In an indirect way I found out he'd applied for a post in one of our experimental factories. His record at Cambridge is good, and there's nothing wrong with his personal record, so he's being sent to—well, it's a special plant somewhere in the Midlands."

"Very hush-hush, Philip?"

"Entirely hush-hush. Lottie"—the man leaned forward,

smiling into her eyes — "if he knows his stuff our boy'll have a chance to do something for this crazy world . . . and for his own country. We can use atomic power for destructive purposes. Soon, I hope, we'll be able to employ it in real constructive work, to brighten and benefit human lives." He ran his hands down the crease in his trousers. "Does it sound like an armchair scientist in a Sunday newspaper?"

Her laugh tinkled.

"Darling, you're so far ahead of the average man that you've got behind the times. The armchair pontificators now write for the Monday morning Press. Have done since the end of the war. Probably because the dailies pay better than the Sundays. But I wouldn't know."

He laughed. "Your set of practical, everyday values always did stagger me, Lottie."

"You forget I did write for a time. But I somehow never became a journalist. Perhaps" — she grimaced — "I have the theatre to thank for that."

"Or Peter," he said softly, glancing away at the fire.

For some moments they were silent.

"You know, Philip," she said after a while, "what you've told me has made me feel very happy. I shall hear from him. He never fails to write, for I believe he's the most dutiful son a mother ever had. He's — yes, it sounds old-fashioned, but it's none the less true — lovable."

Then she saw the bleak, pinched look on his averted face, and was swiftly compassionate. She rose, and knelt beside him, holding one of his hands in hers.

"Don't take it so hard, Philip," she said, in a hushed voice that was little more than a whisper. "He's yours as much as mine. I know how a father must think of the son that one day will follow him — "

"It isn't that, Lottie." He looked down at her, and shook

his head. "Our bargain was sealed many years ago. Any regrets either of us might have had have died long since. But sometimes I get a feeling that we haven't been fair to him. Sometimes I feel that if he could choose — or perhaps I mean if he could have chosen when we made the choice for him — well, the choice would have been different. Such a feeling is disturbing, Lottie."

The pause that followed was broken only by the soft, friendly chatter of the flames in the grate. A taxi's horn blew stridently in the street below.

"No," she said, and her voice was firm and her gaze resolute. "No. If he knew the truth he'd agree with everything we did. He'd agree because he'd understand why we did it. Some day, Philip dear, I'll tell him. Then he'll be proud, as I am. Both of us will share you then, in a new way. Because of what we did, Philip, you were able to help Britain in her gravest hour, when a new national life had to be forged and the whole country's war machine had to be remodelled, as it were, overnight. You were the man they looked to, Philip, to produce the national industrial revolution, and you didn't fail. Your record is a proud one. Can't you conceive how I feel about that? Don't you realize how much — now — I know I was right, those years ago, refusing to marry you, when I saw and knew — "

"Lottie," he broke in, "I've never really understood you — not fully, I mean. You know I've never pretended to. But I could have been happy without the success other men seek and go on seeking."

"For a while, Philip, yes. That's true, my dear. We could have been divinely happy."

"We were," he said almost as a protest.

"Yes," she agreed softly, in the tone of a woman looking backward to a happy past, "we were. And it could have con-

tinued, Philip. I know. But for how long?"

He did not answer. He stared at the fire, as though he would find an answer in its red heart.

She went on, a dreamy quality in her soft voice.

"Sooner or later you would have striven to soar. You would not have been able to help yourself. It was instinctive with you. You're one of those mortals, Philip dear, to whom the gods give wings. Your love could not have stood the test of dropping down to earth again. The bitter truth would have poisoned your heart, and I could not have borne that. I knew the truth then, I know it now. If you'd married Lottie Desmond, the notorious divorcée, you would have laden yourself with chains. Your wings would not have aided you then, Philip."

She roused herself, picked up a poker from the stand of fire irons, and stirred the blaze to new life.

It was as though her movement broke a spell. He sat back in his chair, and there was a wry smile curving his mouth.

"The old arguments, Lottie. You keep them bright over the years. I wonder how often you furbish them."

Her head turned. He saw the false brightness of unshed tears in her dark eyes.

"That's a little too perceptive for a man, Philip." She summoned a smile. "And a man who has plenty with which to occupy his time."

"Never too much to crowd out you, Lottie," he said, leaning forward and trying to capture her glance, which she avoided. "That's the way it's always been, and always will. Even when I married Margaret the old reservation was in my mind—"

She twisted quickly, and was beside him again, with the fingers of her left hand against his mouth.

"Remember the bargain, Philip." And as he would have protested she went on quickly, "Yes, the bargain, for we were

level-headed. We rather prided ourselves on that. We were modern and, we thought, very sane. Ours was a love not bounded by four walls and the space of a few earthly years. Remember? Remember, too, the agreement? Margaret was to have a fair deal. Nothing cheap and shoddy. No make-believe or bogus lip talk — ”

“She’s had a fair deal, as you put it, Lottie,” he said gravely. “I’ve been a good husband to her, and I say that sincerely. And I love Sylvia. She — she has had to make up for Peter.”

She went back to her chair.

“Yes, I had Peter,” she nodded. “I’m glad, deeply glad — and grateful too — that he is a son. He has had to fill a large place in my heart, Philip. We both have had to compromise, and with people like us compromise isn’t easy, especially in matters that are fundamental, that concern our very life. But some day he’ll know the truth, as I said, Philip, and then he’ll understand. I think he’ll be proud of us. He must if he understands truly, my dear. And he will. I feel it. I feel he’ll be proud and happy. Peter is like that. Like you, Philip, in many ways.”

She sighed, and he did not interrupt her this time. He could see that she was happy with her thoughts, and he was grateful that she did not notice the look of strain he knew was showing on his own face.

“When he realizes that his father — *his* father — was the man chosen to be the Director of Industrial Coordination in the terrible war years, he’ll appreciate that there is indeed a planned pattern to our lives, Philip . . . and to his. I wouldn’t have had it otherwise. No,” she asseverated, with quiet vehemence, “I wouldn’t change a day, Philip. If you’d married me there’d have been a few more happy, idyllic years, and then . . . what? Disillusion . . . regret . . . perhaps something more terrible and soul-destroying. Perhaps love dying and turning to some-

thing too horrible to contemplate between us, Philip — ”

“Never, Lottie!”

She leaned forward and patted his knee. “Yes, Philip, believe me, my dear, I know. I knew then. I thank God that He gave me the light to see clearly and the courage to act before it was too late. Even after the years that have passed the divorce court still leaves a stain. I’ve watched my friends. Much has been done by understanding men and women to overcome prejudices and outworn ideals of more restricted ages, but the man or woman who blunders in taking a marriage partner still has to pay for that blunder . . . . some way, Philip. You wouldn’t have had a successful career as the man who married Lottie Desmond just for love of her. You had to ‘marry right,’ Philip. I’m not being sarcastic, my dear. I’m stating a simple truth I’ve known for years. Only by such a marriage could you hope to continue to do the things you wanted to do. Because certain doors were not shut to you, my dear, you’ve been a great success, the man who did as much as any man to bring Britain safe through the war years, the man who is about to bring a new age of prosperity to her by offering her industries a wonderful source of power — ”

He smiled bitterly, and this time did interrupt.

“I should have kept you as a Press agent, Lottie. You find the glamour and ignore the secret silences, the empty spaces that are empty because they can never be filled in this life.”

She said, and her voice trembled, “Do you think I don’t know them too, dearest?”

They were silent again while the blaze in the hearth dwindled.

“And so,” he said at last, as though reflecting aloud, “Philip Chawson, Viscount Drumburgh, is a power of sorts in the land because the woman he loved refused to let him be an ordinary family man.”



"That woman is very glad today, Philip. We haven't youth any more, but we have compensations. I have. Yes, I'm really glad today, Philip."

"Is that said from your heart, Lottie?"

"Straight from my heart, Philip. I'm woman enough—and in my own way possessive enough, I believe—to take satisfaction in the results of what I did years ago. I hold no false claims, demand no secondary allegiance. Those things were never necessary with us. As they would say today, there were no strings to our bargain. Your marriage to Margaret Tanthorn gave me no real hurt. I knew the Tanthorn Associated Industries were a rung in a ladder you were destined to climb. I wanted only one thing, Philip—was jealous only for one thing—for you to reach the top of that ladder and make me proud of you. You've done that, my dear. You're at the very pinnacle of your success. I've read today's papers. Columns of praise for what you've already achieved, implicit trust in your powers to make the world safe—almost I had said adoration, Philip."

He laughed lightly.

"The kind of adoration bestowed by the Press, Lottie," he said, "lacks any real quality of permanence. You may soon read the obverse of the medal . . . . carping criticisms, one's words torn from their context and misquoted. The pen can be a very heavy bludgeon, I've found, for a so-called public figure."

"You've stood up to it before."

He smiled at this quick turn in his defence.

"True. But I'm not so young. I find myself at times thinking wistfully of the quiet backwaters of life, Lottie. I've no love of power for itself, only for what it can be directed to accomplish. I'm not a Utopian, though I've been called everything from the bluest diehard to the reddest Marxist. I don't seek the public eye—"

"That's known to the discerning, Philip."

He laughed, more at his ease now. "One thing's sure, Lottie, you've not lost your capacity for giving back to me my dwindling faith in myself. You've always been the same. Whenever I've come to you I've listened to a pep talk. If I'm not careful, I know, you'll be lecturing me again tonight, and for once I'm not standing for it. I'm not going to be sidetracked."

She gave him a puzzled smile.

"From what, Philip?"

He waved a hand. She had seen him make the same gesture in a newsreel film of a conference he had attended recently. It was not a gesture she remembered him having in the old days.

"Well," he said, staring across the room, "a couple of matters, actually. First, I've arranged with my bankers — No, don't interrupt me, Lottie. It's done and settled. The only way I've ever overruled you is to produce a *fait accompli*. I've arranged with them to make what I think will be an adequate increase to the sum they pay monthly to your credit. After all, the end of the war didn't bring a lowering of prices, and you've Peter to think of —"

"Your stock argument, Philip. I haven't wanted for anything, and when Peter went up to Cambridge —"

"He was a credit to both of us," he broke in hurriedly. "The report he received from his principal at the Cavendish Laboratory was one of the most encouraging that —"

"Now who's side tracking?" she challenged.

He coughed.

"All right," he said, "I'll come to the second matter. I've made a fresh will. Oh, for various reasons. But one, again, is Peter. I'm satisfied he has a future, but he may need the right sort of encouragement at a crucial moment, and, after all, as his father —"

"You've made further provision for both of us?"

He fidgeted. "You know, Lottie," he said, with mock severity,

"that's another trait of yours — making what I say sound portentous and stagy by — "

"You did say no sidetracking."

He took a deep breath and looked at her very fondly. He rose and sat on the arm of her chair, and ran a hand lightly across the back of her white neck.

"No sidetracking, Lottie," he agreed. "Yes, that's what I've done. I — I've had a feeling lately that — well, I might not last long enough — "

She caught his arm. Some strange note in his voice had awakened fear in her.

"My God, Philip, what is it?" she murmured, her eyes wide.

"I don't know — really."

"Philip, look at me. You're afraid. I know it. Something's happened to make you believe you're in danger. My dear, please don't try to hoodwink me. I know I'm right. This danger, it — it isn't — "

He recovered himself quickly, and slipped his arm round her.

"Nothing, my dear. I live in a world of rumors, and sometimes — well, sometimes one gets a little hypersensitive, I suppose. Now what I wanted to tell you — "

"Philip" — she clung to him — "I've a feeling . . . I — Have you told Margaret? She is concerned, Philip. You must think of her, and your daughter, and — "

"There, there," he murmured, as he patted the curls now freely streaked with gray. "You're alarming yourself unduly, Lottie. Now let's be sensible middle-aged people. I was going to say that I've a sizable fortune. The Drumburgh Trust, which controls all the combines and companies in which I've an interest, including the Tanthorn Group, is enjoying very robust health. We got into our stride rapidly after the cessation of hostilities and were one of the first organizations to start exporting on a considerable scale."

"No more than was to be expected of a mammoth organization that produces everything from tin-tacks to tractors," she said.

"So the home public does read our advertisements," he teased, but immediately became serious again. "I have a duty to you and Peter. The happiness of both of you means—well, a very great deal to me, Lottie. I don't want that happiness jeopardized—ever."

He paused, and she did not speak, for the hand resting on her shoulder was suddenly a heavy weight.

"I've arranged," he went on, "for certain Drumburgh Consolidated A Stock to be transferred into your name. Then, should anything happen to me—I've done the same for Peter. He won't be told—until you break the news. Then you can tell him you bought the stock some years ago before the reconstruction of the Drumburgh Trust. I think that's simple enough. And now"—he glanced at his watch—"it's only a few moments before the nine o'clock news. Will you switch on your radio, Lottie? Oh, yes, one last thing. Don't trouble yourself about the transaction at all. I've arranged for a brokerage firm to undertake it. They'll explain everything to you and submit full details, just as though they were working on your instructions—as indeed they will be."

She switched on the radio and they listened together to the news announcer. Just before the weather forecast was read he said, "I'm going up to the Midlands for a short time. If Peter doesn't come up to expectations I shall take you seriously to task, Lottie."

He laughed, and she tried to match his tone of light raillery.

"If he doesn't come up to expectations, his father will have to answer to me, I'm thinking."

He rose and held out his hands. She took them and let him pull her to her feet. He took her in his arms and kissed her

fondly as the announcer began the weather forecast for the next day.

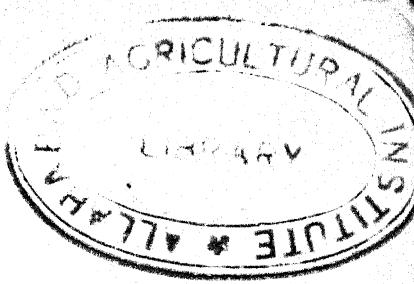
"Lottie."

"Yes, Philip?"

That was a moment precious to both of them. They were gazing tenderly into each other's eyes, and neither heard the door open quietly nor saw the figure that edged round it. The figure raised something in its hands, and suddenly, over the words of the Air Ministry's report for farmers, there was a stuttering chatter of tommy-gun fire.

The figure moved silently across the room and with a gloved hand switched off the radio. Without so much as a glance at the two crumpled figures it crossed to the light switch and pressed it up. Then it moved to the body of the man, withdrew a small key from a pocket of the black waistcoat, and continued on silent feet towards the door. The flames in the hearth crackled and burned to cold ash before the door was opened again.

The news of that discovery made the front page of every national daily in the country.



## CHAPTER II

### A SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

THE ASSISTANT Commissioner looked up as his door opened, and he took off his reading spectacles.

"Come in, Slade," he said. "I want a few words with you. Sit down. Now" — when the newcomer had chosen a chair and sat down — "I'm going to switch you to the Drumburgh case."

Anthony Slade showed his surprise.

"Chief Inspector Windrop's on it," he pointed out, "and he comes in Larkins' area."

The A.C. sat back, dangling his spectacles.

"I've had a word with Superintendent Larkins. Windrop will be reporting to you from now on. There are certain complications — rather delicate ones — which bring the case within your province. This is definitely not an ordinary murder case, despite the woman angle. You've read the reports, of course?"

He was assured on this point.

"Very well, we don't want the case to become another big spread for the Sunday papers."

"I don't see how you can stop it, sir," Slade said bluntly. "Drumburgh was a national figure. He is shot in a private flat. Both he and the woman are riddled with bullets. It's not only sensational, it's made-to-measure for Fleet Street."

"True. But that's merely one aspect of the case, Slade. I'm not really concerned about the obvious details. But I'm very concerned about the less obvious facts. And so's the Home Office and the Board of Trade. In fact, the whole Cabinet's

unsettled by what's happened. Drumburgh had several experimental factories working day and night to perfect a new method of employing atomic energy. His murder isn't all it appears to be at first glance. We don't want a lot of probing by people who have no idea of the gravity of the true situation. Do you follow me, Slade?"

"So far, yes, sir."

"All right." The spectacles were placed on the desk, and the A.C. folded his arms. "There's one rather special complication. It appears that when Drumburgh left his house on the night he was murdered he took with him the details of a special dynamo that has passed its primary tests and is about to be put into production in one of his secret factories. That dynamo is controlled and fed by atomic energy. The affair is housed in a large power plant, but it is completely self-contained. Drumburgh has had an army of physicists working on this thing. Apparently they approached the entire problem of atomic energy from a different angle. By using gaseous compounds instead of the metallic ores which formed the basis of the American experiments in New Mexico and Tennessee they have opened up a different phase of atomic research — one, thank God, which can apparently be harnessed within a reasonable period of time. That's all I know, and even that would probably bring a smile to the face of one of the Drumburgh scientists. But you can see what's at stake, Slade. Drumburgh was murdered as a matter of high policy—or so it would appear. And we've got to be on what we hope is the safe side. We've got to start from that angle. Because the details of the dynamo are missing from his car. He would have locked the car when he left it — as, indeed, he did in Moonby Street — and his family and chauffeur are positive that he always kept the key in his waistcoat pocket. It wasn't there when Windrop examined the body."

The A.C. unfolded his arms and sat back, relaxing in his chair. His eyes met Slade's.

"We're up against it. We've got the Cabinet on our neck. Those details of the dynamo mustn't get out of the country."

"That's up to the Foreign Office and the Secret Service, surely," Slade said.

"Very definitely. But meantime we've got to find out everything we can internally. If a spy shot Drumburgh we shan't get far. If there is another motive — possibly commercial — then it really is up to us. But of one thing you can be reasonably certain. This is no *crime passionel*, and the details of the dynamo were not stolen by someone who merely wanted to throw a handful of dust in our eyes. It wasn't that sort of dust."

"Just how do you mean, sir?" Slade queried.

"Drumburgh had a secret pocket in the side of his car. It was completely concealed, and not every one who travelled with him knew of this pocket. His chauffeur did, and so did his secretary. Moreover, the car had a special locking device installed by his own engineers, and a special key. The car was an American model, and any normal key for that model would not have been of any use in gaining entry to the car. No, whoever wanted Drumburgh out of the way knew about the car and the secret pocket, and knew, furthermore, that the papers were in the pocket that night. We don't need to go casting any nets. We can start from there, I'm convinced."

"Mind you" — the A.C. leaned forward again — "Windrop has done a lot of useful work. He's had Clinton with him, and you know Clinton's sound from your past experience of him in Department X<sup>2</sup>. But Windrop is watched by the reporters. We can't stop that. It's up to you to work out a scheme that will keep the publicity down to a minimum. The general public does not know that Drumburgh had reached

any successful stage in his factory research. You know how the public reacted before the Japs caved in, when those atomic bombs were used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We don't want to start another wave of world-wide speculation."

The A.C. put on his spectacles and picked up a sheet of paper from the desk. For some moments he scanned it, and in those moments Slade had a pause in which to review the unenviable job that had been handed him. He knew it was one of the A.C.'s special assignments. It was to tackle such that he had been promoted to Superintendent.

During the war years he had worked in close liaison with the Ministry of Economic Warfare and the Ministry of Supply as one of the Yard's Chief Inspectors assigned to special duty. He had travelled abroad on secret missions, and his work had impressed several Government Departments. In fact, for Slade it had been a war of movement, right from the early days, and when he returned to the Yard shortly after the close of hostilities in Europe there was a suggestion from one government department that he should go to Germany as a special adviser. However, the first post-war reorganization at Scotland Yard had seen Slade promoted to Superintendent and given special duties at home.

The Press had reported his promotion at the time as the end of the Big Five and the beginning of the Big Six. But Slade had not been given an area to supervise. His job was not to be responsible for the policing of one Metropolitan area like his colleagues of the same rank. He was to act as liaison executive of the Yard with provincial forces in the investigation of any crime which assumed aspects of importance to the nation as a whole.

Actually one of his first jobs had been to coordinate the national hunting down of the first post-war dope ring, the tentacles of which had spread far beyond London and the Home

Counties. But what the A.C. had handed him now was something far more likely to test his powers as a detective and his ability as a Scotland Yard executive.

The A.C. put down the paper.

"H'm," he said, "I see from this note from the Home Secretary that we're expected to produce something for the Cabinet's review fairly soon. Apparently the Drumburgh Trust has affiliations abroad, and some of these people are getting restive. There is the possibility, as I thought, of the matter reaching a political plane, and if it does that won't do us much good here. Politics are bad for policemen. Look at the record of the French police."

Slade concealed a smile. The A.C. was human, and he had his foibles. Politics and the police was a subject that over the passage of years had become his pet mental hobbyhorse.

He achieved a minor tactical advantage by asking a direct question, and swept the A.C. away from his favorite topic.

"Was the car found locked, sir?"

"Yes. This isn't an amateur job. Fingerprint-hunting won't get you far. Windrop can give you all that side of the case. The car's in Drumburgh's garage now. No, Slade, you've got to tackle this case from a new angle. You've got to find a needle in a haystack, and without any modern detector. You've got to take the case apart and find what and where and why. It's going to be difficult, and you'll have to be damned careful or you'll stub your toes badly. Your reports will be for the Cabinet's scrutiny, and I don't envy you that. But I'll give you every help I can. If you want a special line taken with the Press we'll take it. I don't like off-the-record stuff. It's dangerous. Something's always told in confidence, and when that confidence concerns high policy, then there's likely to be trouble. Any questions at this stage?"

"Only the woman."

"Lottie Desmond." The A.C. shrugged. "Can't tell you much. That was her stage name. She was a terrific success years ago, time of the first world war. Sang in *The Great Red Dawn*, I think it was. She'd married a painter chap named Burgoyne. Think it was Burgoyne. But there was a divorce. Made a sensation at the time."

"Apparently she was a lady whose life was crammed with sensations," Slade remarked.

The A.C. threw him an arched look. "Well, she's certainly made some sensations, and not the least is her death. But I shouldn't say her life was exactly crammed with them. For years she's lived quietly alone, so far as anyone can tell, forgotten even by those reporters who write up London diaries."

"Alimony, private means, or money she made on the stage?" Slade inquired.

The question made the A.C.'s mouth kink at the corners.

"Julian Burgoyne divorced her, I believe, so there wasn't any alimony. I don't think she had private means, and I'm very skeptical whether the money she made on the stage would have lasted all these years. They didn't earn the stage salaries years ago they do today, and there weren't any big-paying film contracts to be picked up. So I think she existed—comfortably, mind you—on what Drumburgh allowed her."

"So she was an old flame?"

"An old flame with a son." The A.C. rattled some papers on his desk. "The boy is Peter Burgoyne, but I don't think Julian Burgoyne was his father."

"I suppose her bank has some useful details?"

"The manager has been very cooperative, and relies on our discretion. But Windrop got some background from the contents of an old writing bureau. It had a secret compartment, which contained a number of interesting papers of the kind a newspaper editor would pay a lot for. Old letters, some photo-

graphs and accounts and newspaper clippings. That sort of stuff."

Slade looked serious.

"Drumburgh was a big man. If this gets spilled in handling, sir —"

"You don't have to tell me that, Slade. I know. The Press will try kid-glove methods because the libel laws over here are thought to be one-sided according to a good many people. Lady Drumburgh isn't a flower that blooms unseen, you know. She's well known and moves freely in public. She's done a lot of good work. If any scandalous reporting took on a yellow tinge she'd fight it. Bet your boots on that, Slade. The under-the-rose love story of a man in the public eye is always something for a wise man to keep clear of. Only we're not wise, you and I, Slade. We joined the police."

That was the A.C. scaling the height of humor. Slade smiled dutifully.

"What about the son — Peter Burgoyne?" he asked.

"Well, I can't say. We don't know where he is at the moment. He hasn't come forward. There is the possibility of a revenge motive. You know the line — the son whose father hasn't accepted him as a personal responsibility. But I don't think you'll get anywhere with that, as I said before. The taking of the papers from the car is too significant, and it is certain they were taken by Drumburgh when he left his house."

"Did he call anywhere *en route* to Moonby Street?"

The A.C. shot Slade a quick glance.

"Running along that line, eh?" He shook his head. "We haven't found anything. But of course he could have been playing deep. He had a lot of business enemies, that's sure enough. He sent a lot of men to the wall when he was climbing. That sort are bitter, and don't forget easily. He hadn't time for failures, and precious little for men whose businesses he ab-

sorbed. He wanted things done his way, and that was always the way they were done — in the end. You can make your own inference."

"Yet he was supposed to be a retiring man," Slade mused. "I mean to his intimates."

"I don't think he had many — not real intimates. There was no real gusto with him. He was never the demonstrative type of business magnate. He got his way and pushed his ideas by being right when every one else guessed wrong."

"The only time he was wrong was too late." Slade crossed one leg over the other and gave the A.C. a straight look. "How is Lady Drumburgh taking it, sir?"

"She's upset. Very upset. But she's got her chin up. She's one of the old school, Slade. You won't find her wearing her heart on her sleeve."

"I was thinking of the papers in the writing bureau."

"She hasn't been told about them. No need to jump to anything we can take our time over. Anyway, they won't be her property. They'll belong to Peter Burgoyne. So far Drumburgh just visited a middle-aged woman and was murdered in her company. The woman happens to have been at one time a star of the stage. But she was no longer young — ”"

"Nor was Drumburgh. It isn't going to be hard for his wife to read between such obvious lines, I'm thinking."

"Well, that's her business. We're not telling her what isn't necessary."

"And she won't be told about them?"

"H'm, I see. You mean on grounds of general policy. Well, put it this way — not unless there's no other way of getting vital information. I said this case is difficult. It is — exceedingly. We've got to concentrate on the search for that pile of missing papers. Your best bet at the outset is Terrington — Arthur Terrington. I understand from Windrop he's a smooth

article who goes by the description of industrial private secretary. Terrington will be your key to open any of the locked doors of the Drumburgh Trust. Next to him you'll want to contact James Murchison. He's a key man in the Drumburgh outfit, and from what I've been able to make out of Windrop's reports Drumburgh made plenty of use of him. But he's inclined to be tight-lipped, which may mean something or nothing."

"What about the chauffeur, sir?"

"His name's Sayles — Robert Sayles. Seems to have a clear record. He says Drumburgh frequently took the car himself and told him not to remain up for him. Probably a result of the habit Drumburgh got into during the war. Used to drive himself through the blackout and was called to conferences and committee meetings at all hours of day and night. Yes, there's no doubt he did a pretty big job then, Slade, and there are millions in this country today who think he did more than most. Well, that gives you a few compass points, as it were. I'll have all Windrop's reports sent to you, and I suggest you let him continue along his own line for the moment. Clinton, who is working with him, could be switched if you thought it advisable, and you might just have a word with Larkins, to clear up any departmental overlap. Of course, if it suits you to work out something with Larkins, go right ahead. But I imagine you'll find it necessary to see Murchison pretty soon, and he's in the Midlands at a secret experimental factory. So you've the three angles to work from — Moonby Street, Drumburgh's home, and the factory. I wish you luck, Slade, and keep me posted regularly. If you want me any time, barge in. This is a real priority job."

"You'll want a daily report, then?"

"At least. One every twelve hours would suit me better. I've got to quiet official grumbles, and I can't do that without fresh

news of developments. But count on one thing, Slade. I'm not having you pestered with a lot of red tape. We got rid of a lot of that during the war, and I'm not having it brought back because you may tread on anyone's toes. All I say is, look carefully to see whose toes they are, and then if you have to tread on them — well, let them feel it."

Slade left the A.C. to begin brooding once more over the papers spread on his desk.



### CHAPTER III

#### AT CRAVEN COURT

SERGEANT CLINTON had been with Slade back in the days before the war when the latter had been a member of the Yard's famed "Murder Squad." The two police officers had shared a number of interesting cases, and worked together on many more that had not received much general publicity. Each knew the other's worth from long years of mutual effort, and for the sergeant, at least, it was like turning back to an earlier chapter of his autobiography to be seated once more beside Slade as they drove together to St. John's Wood.

Slade knew the sergeant and had confidence in his ability as a sound detective. Dour, likely to appear at times somewhat unimaginative and a trifle crabbed in his outlook; Clinton was a plodder who usually got somewhere under his own steam. He could be relied upon to believe the evidence of his own eyes. He was thorough. Men like Sergeant Clinton had done their full share to build up the enviable reputation of Scotland Yard.

Slade turned into a gravelled drive, and they saw a white, colonnaded porch at the end of a short tunnel of dark evergreens. As the car swung to a halt, the wheels biting into the gravel, Clinton said, "Nice place. Glad somebody can still afford to pay its rates."

"Nice, but not showy," Slade remarked, "considering the swollen state of the Drumburgh fortune. A coat of paint wouldn't do it any harm."

"The gardener wasn't called up, anyway," Clinton observed. "Or did Lady Drumburgh wield a nifty pair of garden shears?"

But Slade's attention was fixed on a low-slung red sports car. He got out, and crossed with Clinton to the flight of stone steps under the porch. Their ring was answered by a gray-haired manservant with a face becoming to the chief mourner below-stairs. Slade stated who they were, and added, "Mr. Terrington is expecting us."

"Very good, sir."

They were shown into a cheerful waiting room, lined with books and furnished with snug chairs and occasional tables holding cigarettes and magazines.

Clinton cleared his throat as the door closed on the manservant.

"Maybe there's not so much difference between a dentist and a commercial magnate, after all," he surmised, glancing round the room archly, "except in the quality of the curtains. Come to think of it, my missus could —"

However, the domestic revelation was not completed before the door opened once more, and into the room came a short, strangely youthful-looking man with thinning hair and quick, darting black eyes and a too-easy smile. He closed the door, smiling as he did so, and came towards them, glancing from one to the other.

"Superintendent Slade?" he inquired.

Slade nodded. "Mr. Terrington? This is my assistant, Sergeant Clinton."

Terrington beamed while his eyes darted from one man to the other and back again.

"Good," he said, a trifle too effusively. "Temporarily I have installed myself in Lord Drumburgh's study. It was Lady Drumburgh's wish, and it really is more convenient. If you'll follow me we'll be able to settle and . . . talk."

His dark gaze lingered for a few moments in Slade's direction, as though he intended to impart some hidden meaning to the

Yard man, then he sprang to the door and opened it again. He led them up a broad staircase and along a wide, airy corridor to a door set angle-wise in a corner. He produced a key, unlocked the door, and bowed them inside.

He drew up chairs for them and pushed forward a box of Virginia cigarettes, and when he returned the key to his waist-coat, tapped the pocket.

"I'm not omitting to take necessary precautions, Mr. Slade," he said, giving the words an intimate inflection. "There are important papers in this room. You will appreciate, I know, why I cannot take — er — chances."

To Slade, who was finding this effervescent personality somewhat difficult to assess correctly, it seemed that the man was bent upon impressing upon them his status in the Drumburgh household.

"You are conversant with the results of the atomic research his lordship was sponsoring, Mr. Terrington?" he asked, making an effort to get down to cases.

Terrington smiled. It was, in truth, a rather pitying smile, more than a trifle condescending, to which both Yard men took silent objection. But Terrington was seemingly very sure of himself. He sat down in the swivel-chair that must recently have been Drumburgh's, and despite his slim figure managed to sprawl in it as he swung it slightly from side to side.

"It's been my personal task, Mr. Slade, to undertake all the coordinate arrangements for his lordship." Terrington looked pleased with himself. "If I say so myself, it wasn't a light task, and much of it has been, from its very nature, quite secret. However" — he hesitated, like a third-rate orator who wishes to make sure of his audience's attention — "I feel, in the tragic circumstances, fairly free to draw for you a rough outline of what his lordship was endeavoring to achieve. There have been — "

That was as far as he got before Slade interrupted what threatened to become a lengthy tirade.

"I read the papers, Mr. Terrington. I know what Lord Drumburgh's vast organization was endeavoring to achieve, if his public relations people gave out the truth."

Just for a moment Terrington looked deflated. But the next instant he was smiling again and preening himself, and the swivel-chair creaked as he swung it.

"Then you probably know about the new system of production control we have instituted. His lordship strove to increase British exports at a time when foreign currency was badly needed by the nation. Output went up, and our factories are humming with activity. No slack time in Drumburgh factories — "

"Background material is very useful," Slade said. "But I've come for more specific information."

"Ah!" Terrington's hands came together under his dark chin. He had long, feminine fingers, with oval nails, Slade noted. They were artistic fingers, which went rather oddly with a man who was supposed to be an expert in matters of practical efficiency. "You are now referring to the missing papers, I take it."

"I am. I've been asked to find them. It would be useful to know just what I have to look for."

Terrington's face fell at that. He looked even a little alarmed, but he took his hands away from his chin, clasped the arms of his chair, and made a visible effort to rally himself.

"Well, those papers had a file number, Mr. Slade. In the office of the secret factory in the Midlands — "

"Just a moment, Mr. Terrington. I've heard of this secret factory. Why was it secret and what made it secret, and from whom was it secret?"

The bluntness of this compound question again gave the

dead Viscount Drumburgh's industrial private secretary something to think about. His hands came to rest on the desk this time, but they did not remain still. The fingers moved and twitched and folded over one another.

"Well, Mr. Slade, the work of that factory was secret. It was not known to the general public or even to the industry. As for the actual building, it was a shadow factory during the war, and the plant proved itself admirable for the sort of work upon which the staff are now engaged. You may remember the deputation of physicists who saw Lord Drumburgh after the original announcement that the knowledge of manufacture of the atomic bomb was not to be shared with the other nations of the world, and you may recall the outcry there was, the debates and articles in the Press —"

"I remember," Slade assured him.

"Yes, of course. Well, that decided Lord Drumburgh to do something about atomic energy. Some of our greatest scientific minds assured him that such terrible energy could be controlled and harnessed for man's good instead of man's destruction. From that premise his lordship started. The factory was specially equipped, a large laboratory staff engaged, and the work began. You realize, naturally, that this was not like starting from — well, scratch, shall we say? Helping in the venture were actual British atomic experts, if I can call them that. I shall be able to provide you with a list of all who took part in the research."

Terrington paused, straightened himself in the swivel chair, and appeared to reflect over his next words.

"The work went forward, Mr. Slade, with the speed and progress that were the hallmark of his lordship's interest during the war years. Indeed, he was able, by pooling certain specialized labor from the Drumburgh chain of factories, to go ahead at a rate which rather surprised the research experts. There was never a hold-up. For months the work continued in secret.

Not a word leaked out. Of course, there were rumors in the Press. There always are. A man like Lord Drumburgh cannot draw breath without other men suspecting him of doing something uncanny. I remember one popular writer described him in a newspaper article as the man who had proved himself to be an industrial conjurer, whatever one of those is. It amused his lordship at the time. But I can truthfully say he did not seek publicity. He was the kind of man who gets it without going out after it and posing. He was a grand chief."

Terrington had been leading up, step by step, to that final avowal. Slade was not convinced that the man's sentiment was entirely genuine. There was something just a little too pliant about the secretary's manner and method of creating an impression on his hearers.

"And now finally things are ready to proceed with the manufacture of the first atomic dynamo?" Slade inquired.

Terrington's brows went up.

"Yes, but not full steam ahead, you know. We've passed experimental stages; we've got to the real production problem, but that can be solved only gradually. It would be senseless to arrange for full-scale production without knowing exactly where one was going with such a — er — article."

"Can Murchison tell me?"

This time the brows came down and Terrington's eyes narrowed. They surveyed the Yard man with a hint of suspicion and surprise.

"He'll probably be able to help you quite a deal in the matter of actual progress, Mr. Slade, but — if you will pardon me — is that helping — I mean in a practical way — to solve the mystery of his lordship's murder?"

"I don't know. I'm getting impressions, that's all. You said, Mr. Terrington, the missing papers had a file number. I should like to know it, please."

"The number is C.I.22.b. All references that we have to them will be found under that index number, Mr. Slade."

To Slade it seemed as though Terrington's manner had subtly changed, become resentful. The Yard man's interest in him underwent a change.

"Just what did the papers comprise?" he asked.

"Details of the production parts, lists of specifications, and some valuable test records and notes."

"Not a plan of the dynamo, then?"

"No, not a plan as such. But possession of the specification details would be just as valuable to a firm undertaking manufacture, perhaps more so. Plans are just —plans. The specifications included lists of alloys and compounds, temperatures and densities. They were very complete."

"Of first-class importance?"

"Absolutely. No question. I understand there is not a complete duplicate of those details his lordship took with him. By that I mean a complete duplicate collected together. The factories have their working counterparts, but it will take a considerable time to correlate them all again."

"I'm afraid this is just Greek to me, Mr. Terrington," Slade confessed. "But you've told me sufficient to realize that the papers his lordship carried in his car would have been of great interest and value to — say, a rival industrial concern."

Terrington laughed thinly.

"There are several international cartels, Mr. Slade, that would have paid millions for the information contained in those papers. I should say it would be impossible to set their value too highly."

"I see. Now, from the practical manufacturing side, who would you say knows as much about the project as anyone?"

"Murchison. He's been at the factory for months."

"And outside Murchison and his staff few people know of

the experiments and their result — the atomic dynamo?"

"That is so. Of course, that is keeping your question on a purely commercial plane."

"What do you mean, Mr. Terrington?"

The secretary swung his chair and faced the Yard man.

"Lord Drumburgh did not go ahead with his plans without notifying the Government of his intention. I can't say, but I imagine he kept in the closest contact with the Cabinet. He was not a politician, as you know. He was a man who put the country first. He was prepared to cooperate for the good of the nation with whatever Government was in power. But just how he dealt with the Cabinet I don't know. There were some things his lordship handled entirely on his own. That was one."

"Then you wouldn't know anything about Mrs. Burgoyne?" Slade said.

Terrington stiffened, but he had to answer the question.

"No," he said, "I'm afraid I can't help you there."

Slade realized that he would get little further real information from the man in the swivel chair.

"And where is this secret factory, Mr. Terrington?" he asked.

Terrington rose and walked to a cabinet in one corner of the room. He unlocked it, pulled open a drawer, and took from it a rolled-up map, which he spread on the desk. Slade and Clinton rose and looked over his shoulder as he ran his finger along a Warwickshire road.

"Here" — his finger paused at a cross, from which proceeded a dotted line — "is a private road which" — his finger traced the dotted line — "extends for a quarter of a mile, and ends at a clearing." On the map the clearing he mentioned was shown by a black dotted rectangle. "It was originally a large plantation of trees. The outer fringe has been retained — during the war that was good camouflage — and in the cleared center is the factory." He indicated a series of red squares in the black-

dotted rectangle. "It comprises a number of buildings, as you can see. They're spaced, but connected by underground tunnels. Each can be tackled separately in the event of fire breaking out. Every person entering the factory has a special pass, which has to be shown here" — his finger swept to the junction of the private road with the main highway — "and here." He now indicated a heavy blue line drawn across the end of the private road, opposite the first red square in the clearing. "That is following the procedure of the war years, when the factory was guarded by the military," he added. "Every pass is numbered, but not in strict rotation. We took special precautions, as even the best passes can be forged. Another practice retained from the war, gentlemen. No guard will allow anyone to pass unless the number on the pass is divisible by seven."

"Neat idea," Clinton murmured. "Guards must be slick."

"They're picked men."

"I take it you'll give us passes, Mr. Terrington?" Slade said.

"Certainly. I'll get them now."

Terrington went to a safe in the wall beside the cabinet, dialed a combination, and swung back the door. From a tray he took a black-japanned box, which he unlocked with another key from his bunch, and he came back to the desk carrying a couple of squares of blue pasteboard, each crossed with a broad red diagonal. Without saying anything, he placed them on the desk, and from a drawer took a rubber stamp, touched it on a pad, and stamped the cards in the center. He handed the passes to Slade, who glanced at them. One was numbered PD.721, the other PE.4214. The rubber stamp presented the crude outline of a griffin holding a torch.

"The Drumburgh crest," Terrington explained.

Slade slipped the passes into his pocket wallet.

"Thank you, Mr. Terrington. I'm now —"

The sound of a key turning in the lock of the door stilled

his words. The three men glanced towards the door, which opened, and a dark-eyed, dark-haired girl with bright red lips and cheeks and a slim, boyish figure almost ran into the room.

Her eagerness changed to momentary dismay when she saw the reception committee of three waiting by the desk. She pulled up abruptly, and for a moment stared wildly round her, as though her thought was of flight. Her right hand still grasped the key with which she had opened the door.

However, before she could turn, Terrington spoke. His voice was controlled, but angry and vibrating just a little as he said, "I didn't know you had a key, Sylvia."

Slade saw her bite her lip, and then her chin tilted, as though in defiance. He realized the kind of daughter Lord Drumburgh had fathered, a fighter who didn't squeal when she was hit.

"It's supposed to be a secret," she said, with a slight inflection in her rich-toned voice that made Terrington wince.

It was obvious to the Yard men looking on that these two were enemies within the Drumburgh household. Slade rather thought that in Sylvia Chawson, the secretary had met his match. He was impressed in the girl's favor.

"This is Superintendent Slade and Sergeant Clinton, of Scotland Yard, Sylvia. They're making certain confidential inquiries — "

Terrington paused.

The girl's eyes had lighted up at mention of the Yard men's names. She moved forward, smiling warmly, and Slade found himself grasping a cool hand that returned his grip firmly and looking into a pair of clear brown eyes, at that moment troubled and dubious, but with still a hint of gay laughter behind their brooding inquiry.

"I'm an old fan of yours," she announced surprisingly.

## CHAPTER IV

### A GIRL WITH A WILL

I NDEED!"

Slade smiled at her.

She nodded with that same chin-tilting gesture that somehow was not grotesque in her, and flashed a quick glance towards Clinton.

"And I include Sergeant Clinton," she said, and received a beam from Clinton, whose collar became a little too tight at that moment, although he had not noticed it earlier. "I'm quite a gory person really," she offered as explanation, and the hidden laughter in her eyes crept forward into a glittering smile. "I read thrillers and newspaper accounts of horrible crimes. I wallow in blood and clues and wade through interminable reams of court-room evidence. Maybe it's just a passing phase, but if so it's taking a long time to pass. I like reading about the Yard's 'Murder Squad,' and I remember lots of your cases, Mr. Slade. That was before you became one of the Big Six, and — "

Slade laughingly interrupted.

"I think you'd better spare me from my own past," he said.

There was a polite—too polite—laugh from Terrington, who said, with just the wrong patronizing accent, "You'll give Mr. Slade the wrong idea about yourself, Sylvia, if you color the account too highly."

She made a *move*, in which she contrived to draw her nose into a likeable dot.

"You mustn't take at face value all Mr. Terrington tells

you, Mr. Slade," she said lightly. "He's far too professional in his technique of creating the right impression."

Terrington laughed again, this time not so politely. Slade caught the note of strain in it, and was in time to see the angry, baffled look the man threw at the girl, whose back was half turned towards him.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" Slade asked, trying to extricate her from a difficult situation.

But Terrington wasn't having any.

"I'm sure she didn't use a secret key for that reason, Mr. Slade," he said quietly, but with patent malice.

It was up to the girl.

She realized they were all looking at her, waiting for her to speak. Visibly she rallied.

"As a matter of fact it was a secret visit. I came to steal that—Oh, it's gone!"

She stared at the wall opposite her father's desk.

Terrington said, "What's gone? What do you mean, Sylvia?"

"The picture," she said.

Terrington was not acting, Slade was sure. He appeared to be trying to remember, and he was successful. When he spoke he sounded puzzled.

"That's right. I remember now. It was a portrait of a woman at a window, and the sky in the distance was a violent reddish tinge. One got the impression, I don't know why, that it was daybreak. I didn't like the picture, but she was a striking woman."

While he was speaking the girl watched him closely, as though weighing his words.

"Do you know where it is?" she asked when he stopped.

"Do I know? Lord, no! I scarcely gave the thing a thought. It wasn't till you yourself pointed out just now that it was missing—"

He hesitated, looking at her with renewed interest.

"Does the picture mean anything to you, Sylvia? You know what I mean."

She returned his stare.

"I don't know what you mean. It means nothing to me except —"

"Yes?"

"I came to get it."

"Secretly. Yet it doesn't mean anything to you, Sylvia."

The odd note in Terrington's voice could have been subdued gloating, as if he knew he had scored over a rival.

"Not a thing."

"To James, perhaps."

She flushed hotly. The bright color swept up to her temples.

Slade moved to spare her any further embarrassment.

"I'm afraid the sergeant and I are not really necessary to this scene, and if you'll excuse us —"

But the girl was ready with a quick denial.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "This is just a piece of natural by-play, Mr. Slade. You'll have to forgive us. You see, Mr. Terrington has never quite got around to excusing me for failing to appreciate his own masculine charm —"

"Sylvia!"

Terrington wore his anger like a crown — one several sizes too small.

She gave him a smile.

"Don't go coy and protest, my dear Arthur, or the joke will be too much, even for James's sense of humor, and you know how generous that is."

Her goad pierced deeply. Terrington was beside himself, and Slade saw for the moment, in the heat of argument, he had forgotten his audience. He was strangely obsessed by something of which the girl had reminded him.

"If Murchison thinks he's ousted me from—"

He checked himself, but too late. He cast a quick glance at Slade, and forced a grin that reminded the unimpressed Clinton of the expression on a death's-head.

He shrugged his lean shoulders.

"You're too impulsive, Sylvia, and I'm afraid — speaking for myself — it's apt to make others extravagant in expressing themselves. Mr. Slade, I don't think I can be of much further service to you at the moment, but if you want to see me again before you leave — well, I shall be available. Meantime" — he cast an enigmatic glance in the direction of the girl — "perhaps you'd like to continue with your inquiry. I'm sure Sylvia will prove responsive. But I warn you" — he managed another brief, effeminate laugh — "the impulsiveness you've witnessed is one-sided. Excuse me."

He went out.

The girl turned and faced Slade. She sighed theatrically, and folded her arms.

"I suppose in your work, Mr. Slade, you're used to family exhibitions and ructions. They always seem frightfully nauseating to me, so heaven knows what you feel. But as I don't feel in the least sorry about the pleasant little scene you've just witnessed I know you won't expect me to apologize."

Slade grinned.

"Of course not. But you've roused my interest, I must confess."

"Oh? How?"

"You said family exhibitions."

"Arthur you mean? Oh, he'd be a member of the family if he got his way. He protests a rare affection for me. You've experienced something of its rarity."

"He could be jealous, couldn't he?"

"Very. Quite between ourselves, I don't think much of Ar-

thur Terrington. Not that what I think matters much. He's got a colossal conceit of himself."

"I meant jealous of James Murchison."

The girl looked up.

"I'm in love, Mr. Slade, with a man who loves me. I don't make any bones about it. Why should I?"

Slade considered it safer to ignore the question, which wasn't really meant for him.

"I know Mr. Murchison's a key man in one of your father's factories," he said.

He glanced at the map, which still lay unrolled on the desk. The girl followed his glance.

"I was in my father's confidence to some extent, Mr. Slade, and I know something about his secret white hope — the atomic dynamo."

Slade nodded.

"You certainly had a key to the room. That surprised Mr. Terrington."

"Look," she said, "we may as well sit down and be comfortable about this thing. And there are cigarettes in the box on the desk. Do help yourselves. Or do you always keep to a pipe, Mr. Slade? I've seen photos of you in the Press with a pipe in your mouth. Sergeant Clinton, allow me."

Clinton took a cigarette from the box she held out, and Slade thoughtfully filled his pipe and sat down.

The girl chose a cigarette and lit it. "A fortnight ago," she told them, "my father gave me a key to this room. The truth is I've been doing some extremely confidential secretarial work for him. It so happens that my father trusted me."

"Surely —" Slade began, when she interrupted.

"I know what you're going to say, Mr. Slade. Surely my father would trust a member of his own family. I can only say you didn't know my father. He trusted very few people

— really trusted them, I mean. He had Arthur deputizing for him in some things, advising him in others. Arthur's clever. He knows his job, and when he likes he's got a way with him. Oh, Arthur isn't a fool, and my father knew his worth. He had a trick of assessing people right the first time. He knew Arthur had a typical executive's mind, and how he would be useful. But my father only trusted him" — she stretched out her hands and drew them apart — "so far. It was the same with James. So far." The hands spread farther apart, and she dropped them into her lap. "I never knew whether he approved of my choice. He liked James. It happens that my mother doesn't. Her money's on Arthur. Heaven knows why, unless it's just a case of Arthur doing his stuff. I imagine he can prove very charming to some women. And he's clever. I admit it. Does that answer your query about family exhibitions, Mr. Slade?"

Slade nodded and smiled.

"You're being very frank — "

"Don't be misled by me either," she warned. "I've a method in my frankness."

"Which is?"

She leaned forward, tapped her cigarette in an ash tray.

"I want you to clear up the murder of my father without creating any scandal. Or is that asking too much?"

"It may be asking quite a lot. Naturally, I understand that scandal — "

"Mr. Slade," she said earnestly, "I happened to love my father. When he was alive he could be hurt — easily. Now he's dead it's up to me to see his memory isn't . . . . harmed. Do I sound like a sentimental little fool?" she asked.

"No," said Slade slowly. "You sound like a girl with something on her mind."

"Not really, it's only a feeling — a feeling of — "

While she groped for the words she wanted Slade said, "You came here for a picture."

She crushed out the cigarette.

"I did. But you don't think — "

"I want you to tell me, then I shan't have to."

She smiled at the gentle rebuke.

"Well — " she started again, but once more faltered. She looked appealingly at Slade.

"You admitted you came to steal it," he pointed out. "Then you didn't want anyone to know you'd taken it. You wanted it now, after your father's death. You couldn't have taken it while he was alive, could you?"

"No."

"That picture, I take it, meant much to your father."

"You're only guessing, Mr. Slade. You're not really getting anywhere, are you?"

But if her purpose was to discourage Slade she was disappointed. Years of police work had left the Yard man proof against the wiles of the artful and artless alike.

"We'll see," he said genially. "It's a portrait. I know that much. Of a striking woman, to take Terrington's testimony, and I should say it was at least average in such matters."

"Better," she insisted.

"Very well, better. We'll accept his word, then, that this woman was a striking creature. It was, furthermore, a picture your father kept here, in his private sanctum. He did not have it hung where others would — shall we say share it? No, he kept it to himself. And of course it would be an original, wouldn't it?"

She was staring at him with shadowed eyes. She did not reply to the question. She sat very still, as though waiting for something she secretly dreaded.

Slade drew on his pipe. He was not overtly watching her,

but he was aware that her tense young face had lost its previous look of defiance.

"It would be — how many years old?"

She remained silent.

Slade went on, "Let's say twenty — no, thirty, I think. Yes, about thirty. Portrait painters haven't been arranging their subjects at windows for a full thirty years. And that brings us to war-time London, lots of young officers in khaki, lots of laughter, brief spells of leave, and very gay musical shows playing in the West End. Shows like *The Great Red Dawn*."

She sat very still.

"But you probably never heard of it. Or of Lottie Desmond, the star of the show. She's said to have packed the theatre for month after month. As they used to say in those days, she was the rage. She got a deal of publicity in a divorce case. Her husband was a painter — Julian Burgoyne. I've looked him up quite recently. He specialized in painting beautiful women. He had the trick of glamorizing them before Hollywood discovered it. Used bright backgrounds and settings for his subjects. Anyway, it would be pure coincidence, of course, if he had chanced to paint the portrait of a striking woman sitting at a window watching a flushed dawn break —"

"What do you know? How much?"

The words were uttered in a low tone, almost a whisper. But there was a fierceness about them that was arresting. Her hands were lying in her lap, clenched.

"What should I know?" Slade countered, rubbing the stem of his pipe in the palm of his left hand.

She shook her dark head.

"I don't know. That's the devil of it." She sounded genuinely puzzled. "I really don't know. I wish to goodness I did. But that picture meant much to my father. He'd never talk about it. I tried to get him to once. He just sat and stared

at me as though he had never seen me before. It was just as though he was a stranger to me, and it frightened me. I—I didn't ask him again. But I've seen him sometimes staring at it —at *her*—”

“As though he knew her personally?”

“More than that. With a sort of hunger in his face. I couldn't bear it. It made me want to cry, and—oh, damn it, Mr. Slade, I'm not that sort of girl! I just don't want to cry normally—about anything.”

She became silent again.

“You were curious, I suppose?”

“More than that. I suppose I was a bit jealous. Of *her*. Because she meant something to him that he would not share, even with me.”

“And you decided you wanted to find out at last who she was? Is that it?”

She stared gravely back at him.

“God knows why I'm telling you all this, Mr. Slade,” she said. “It can't matter a bean to you or the job you're tackling. Yet—”

“Yet the picture is missing, isn't it?”

She nodded.

Slade was not quite convinced that she had been frank with him. He sensed that she had been very fond of her father and that loyalty was second nature to her. She would go to great lengths to keep a trust—even for the sake of someone who was dead.

“How long ago is it since you last saw the picture?”

“It was here two days ago. I stood over there staring at the artist's scrawled signature—”

“Then you can confirm something for me. It was Burgoyne's signature?”

“Yes,” she said softly. “Julian Burgoyne, written with a

flourish, and an enormous blob after the *e*." She glanced up after staring down at her entwined fingers. "Tell me, Mr. Slade, do you know much about his work?"

"Very little—almost nothing, I'm afraid," Slade confessed. "He was a brief Society fashion. When the fashion was over so was Burgoyne. His subjects were what made him fashionable. So far as I can make out he was more of an advertising agent than a portrait painter. He didn't last in favor long after the divorce. Beyond that I don't think I've anything—"

"Stop," she said excitedly. She leaned forward. "What did you say was the title of his wife's stage success?"

*"The Great Red Dawn."*

"I wonder . . . . My God, if—"

Her eyes were suddenly very round and very large, and very close to tears.

"Mr. Slade," she said, "you and I know too much now to fool each other. The house in Moonby Street, where my father was found—it was her house. She was murdered with him. They died together, although they had lived apart. *She* was the woman in the picture."

"And it's missing," Slade added.

She probably did not hear. Her mind was running on with a fascinating sequence. There was a note of awe in her trembling voice.

"Lottie Desmond—the Mrs. Carlotta Burgoyne of the house in Moonby Street—her husband the artist who painted her picture at a window, symbolic—*The Great Red Dawn*—and my father kept the picture here, in this room, where he could look at it when alone—and he was found with her in the Moonby Street house, murdered . . . ."

Her words trailed away. Her eyes came back to the Yard man.

"All that isn't coincidence, Mr. Slade. I don't have to be

trained at Scotland Yard to add up those bits of evidence. No, you wouldn't call them evidence. They're not. They're just links in a chain. A chain that will load my father's memory with scandal. That's why I asked you not to . . . ”

She braced herself, stared hard at the patch on the wall where the picture had hung.

“I'm being silly — emotional. Take no notice of me, Mr. Slade. I'm just — not myself in some things. That's all. You're going to the factory — James's factory. Is there anything you want me to tell you about James? After all, it's only natural that a girl should be interested in what the police know about the man she's intending to marry.”

“Very natural. But I think Mr. Murchison will keep till I get along and see him. It would be of more help, perhaps, if you personally were able to assure me that the papers that are missing really were taken by your father into the car that night.”

“Oh, they were taken all right. I locked them in his dispatch-case. I saw Arthur put the dispatch-case in the secret pocket of the car — ”

“You knew about the secret pocket?”

“Didn't I say my father trusted me, Mr. Slade?”

He nodded. “You did — and I had not forgotten. You've seen the car?”

“You mean since it was brought back? Yes, I haven't examined it, of course. Sayles has it in the garage. Don't get any notions about him, Mr. Slade. He worshipped my father. If he knew anything against my father he wouldn't tell you. Make no mistake about that.”

“I don't think I shall — now,” Slade said. “But there is a question I'd like to put to you about the picture.”

“Well?”

“Who do you think took it?”

She must have expected the question, for she took it very calmly. "The only person I can think of, Mr. Slade, is my mother."

"She hasn't a key to this study?"

"Arthur has."

"And he—"

"Is putty in my mother's quite capable hands. He wouldn't thank me for saying so, but that doesn't make it any less true. It's rather pitiful when he's with her. You see the self-sufficient executive cut down to his right size in rompers."

"But your mother finds him useful?"

"Very useful. Arthur can be the most natural smokescreen in the world."

"Now you're rousing my interest."

"Well, that's one way of asking me to stir up the mud."

"Mud?"

"Scandal can work two ways in a family, Mr. Slade. For years my father was wrapped up completely in his work, to the exclusion of almost every other thing. He always found time for me. Always. There were times when he made time for me. I'm glad — now. It's a nice feeling to have — and remember. Of course outwardly he and my mother were a contented middle-aged couple with a grown daughter. But the picture is deceptive. I've been conscious of a growing rift — oh, for years past. You know, the sort of thing that happens so gradually that no one takes any notice of it until it's too late to do anything about stopping it. It was a one-sided rift, too. I'm positive my father did not know that my mother had grown away from him during the years. Perhaps . . . he did not care."

"There was a reason?"

Her mouth trembled. "I'm being a little swine, and very disloyal to my own mother, but somehow I can't help it. I seem to be unable to help thinking of my father, and . . . " She

grimaced, as though at an unpleasant thought. "The reason was — and is, for that matter — Sir Morton Cashern."

It was Slade's turn to be surprised. He took his pipe from his mouth and stared at her. "The financier?" he queried.

"That's what a lot of people call him. But hold your horses, Mr. Slade. You wouldn't seriously consider Sir Morton Cashern as a man who'd go around shooting people with a tommy-gun. The man positively burned himself out organizing big savings groups during the war, inaugurating fresh and novel ways to get funds for the Red Cross, for the various help-this and help-that appeals."

"I know Sir Morton's public record," Slade assured her. "But why did you tell me about him? You had a reason, I know."

She smiled shyly.

"You happen to be more adroit at extracting information, Mr. Slade, than a dentist at pulling teeth. I knew that much when Arthur made a stage exit and left me with the wolves — as he probably thinks. No, don't say anything. There's no need, I assure you. In the second place there's something I think you should know. It's not a palatable morsel, but we're dealing in facts, not fiction. I'm telling you because I'm sure that you will not learn it from my mother or Arthur. She had reached the stage of having my father watched by a private detective."

Slade exchanged glances with Clinton. The latter grunted, "Makes a difference, certainly."

The girl gave him a sharp look.

"I won't ask you what you mean by that highly ambiguous remark, sergeant," she said. "But I can easily imagine what you're thinking."

"Who is this private agent?" Slade asked.

"An ex-Yard man, who's been in private practice for some years. His name's Smailey. Frederick Smailey."

The groan came from Clinton, and it certainly seemed as

though the sergeant was in pain. She gave him a longer look this time.

"By that wail I rather gather Mr. Smailey and his works are not unknown to you gentlemen."

"Smailey," Slade told her, "left the Yard in something of a hurry after some scandal about stolen jewelry and an insurance company being approached — er — rather by way of the rear entrance."

"I see," she said. "I rather thought as much."

"Do you know who recommended him to your mother?"

"Just by chance I do. Morton Cashern. And now, Mr. Slade, I'm beginning to feel a bit like the stream that was out in the sun too long. I'm dried up. But if you feel that there's anything — "

"I think you've helped us enormously," Slade assured her. "We're very grateful. I know I needn't press upon you the necessity for keeping what you've told us to yourself for the present. You will understand, furthermore, that I'm not in a position, officially or otherwise, to make you any promise or private undertaking. But if I can avoid the scandal you fear — "

"You're very kind and charitable, Mr. Slade, and I can't help feeling, now I've said my piece, a bit like a youngster who's been precocious. But I still want to give you one word of advice, if I may."

"By all means."

"You're going to see my mother and Cashern. All right. It won't be perhaps a novel experience for you, but you'll find it illuminating, I think. And now — don't pull any punches. You let me down gently. Get tough with them right at the beginning. It's the only real way to deal with them and win."

Without giving him a chance to put another question she led the way out of the room, taking care to lock the door.

## CHAPTER V

### MONEY TALKS WITH A LONG TONGUE

SLADE WAS NOT SURE what he expected to find when confronted by Lady Drumburgh and Sir Morton Cashern. Once before he had observed the Tanthorn heiress objectively. The occasion had been years before, when as a junior detective he attended a social gathering at which Margaret Tanthorn shone with splendor. He retained his earlier impression of a woman of medium coloring and somewhat too-square jaw, a woman graceful but not beautiful, gracious but without personal charm, a woman sure of herself and the company around her.

Lady Drumburgh, the widow of the war-time Director of Industrial Coordination, was an older edition of that woman. She was still a woman of grace lacking innate charm, and with the passing of the years she had brought herself to allow her beauty specialist to work on the uncompromising squareness of her jaw. The result was a woman of considerable presence and personality, a woman whose experience had been made to serve her faithfully.

She received the Yard men with a hint of condescension in her manner. Plainly she was not pleased by this return of Scotland Yard officers.

Her companion Slade knew only by repute. Sir Morton Cashern had been well publicized as a shrewd financier and a man who knew what was going to happen in the City forty-eight hours before the men who wrought the change. He had been described at lavish City luncheons as a man whose words found attentive ears not only at home but in the Stock Ex-

changes of the world. And Slade agreed that he looked the part. Well groomed, his graying hair swept back with almost cavalier abandon from his high, arched forehead, he stood, a man slightly more than six feet tall, smiling at the world around him. He presented to the world's gaze the figure of a man who not only knew his own mind, but was prepared to make up the minds of other people.

He and Lady Drumburgh were seated in the drawing-room, discussing something rather earnestly, when Sylvia marched in with the Yard men at her heels.

"Superintendent Slade's in a hurry, I'm afraid, so I thought I'd bring him and Sergeant Clinton straight in. My mother, Lady Drumburgh, Sir Morton Cashern . . . ."

She made the introductions with informal haste and said, "I hope I haven't—"

Sir Morton rose to the occasion.

"Not at all. Not at all, my dear girl." He was on his feet with an easy movement and smiling the smile of the professional good mixer. His left hand, as by habit, sought a monocle tucked into the top pocket of his waistcoat. He surveyed the newcomers. "Your mother and I, Sylvia, merely chanced to be discussing—"

"The new benevolent fund. The organization has to be planned, but we're rather stumped for a suitable name."

Lady Drumburgh's smooth explanation won Slade's approval. It was a neat piece of work. He realized that this gray-haired woman with youthful figure and clear skin would be difficult to stampede. She was the sort who could be very dogged once her mind was made up.

He glanced from the man to the woman. They made a pair. Each appeared—superficially, at least—the counterpart of the other. Counterpart and complement. An onlooker, studying them as Slade was doing, could almost feel the mutual at-

traction flowing between them. It was as though he stood within the field of two powerful electromagnets.

"A new one," said the daughter. "This is the first I've heard of it."

The mother smiled. It was a strange smile, rather fascinating, Slade thought. Certainly unusual. It appeared to combine at the same time wintry reproof and summer-like serenity.

"I'm afraid, Sylvia, you don't interest yourself to any measurable extent in what I'm doing these days." She looked at Slade, and for the first time Slade realized that her eyes were of an unusual violet color, capable of changing with momentary abruptness from dreamy amusement to intense interest. "You said Mr. Slade is in a hurry. Is this more police formality, Superintendent?"

"I don't think you'll find it so, Lady Drumburgh," Slade said evenly. "I'd like to know if you can tell me anything about your husband's intentions for the evening he was murdered."

She flushed. "Your methods are bewilderingly abrupt, Mr. Slade. I should have thought there had been enough news in the Press to give you an idea as to my husband's intentions. If you mean did I know Mrs. Burgoyne—I did not."

"I was not referring to the visit to Moonby Street. I thought that possibly your husband had mentioned some other appointment he was keeping."

She laughed, a controlled musical tinkle that meant nothing.

"My husband did not take me into his business confidence, Mr. Slade. But surely Sylvia or Mr. Terrington could be of more help."

"Apparently not."

"I'm sorry, but there it is. I know my husband's interests were widespread and took him to various meetings at places I know nothing about—"

But she was merely talking words, and found it impossible

to go on stringing them together. Cashern came to her rescue.

"What are you after exactly, Mr. Slade?"

"A murderer and some missing papers," Slade told him.

The monocle was rammed a little more securely into Sir Morton's eye.

"Precisely. But there was a Chief Inspector Windrop who came along and took copious notes. Are you just going over the same ground again? You understand, my dear Superintendent, I don't mean this as a rebuke in any sense. I'm merely inquiring as, of course, Lady Drumburgh finds such interviews quite a strain."

Sylvia glanced at Slade, as though to say. "He's asking for it, so let him have it."

"You were a friend of Lord Drumburgh's, Sir Morton?"

"I?" The man behind the monocle appeared taken aback at the Yard man's question. "Of course, my dear sir. Philip Chawson and I have been friends for more years than I care to remember. But we were friends in the social sense, if I make myself clear. I was not concerned in any way with his manufacturing activities. Oh, I've bought Drumburgh shares occasionally. But who hasn't?" He smiled. "Indeed, yes. Drumburgh Trust Consolidated A Stock is a very rock in the shifting sands of present-day market fluctuations. Ah'm." He pulled himself up, as though realizing that this was not the best chosen moment for an after-lunch oration. "So you see, Mr. Slade, I'm afraid I can't help you."

"Speaking in the social sense, as you put it, Sir Morton, what can you tell me?"

"Huh? Well, now — "

"Do you know why Lord Drumburgh went to Moonby Street?"

Cashern's shoulders squared.

"Are you suggesting — "

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"No, Sir Morton. I'm suggesting nothing. I'm seeking information."

"Well, I've none for you. I'm sorry, but there it is." It was a blanket refusal. "I don't think anyone in this house can help you — really help you, I mean, Mr. Slade. I speak of course only as a friend of the family. But at such a time one feels —"

"Thank you," Slade said. "In that case I'll not waste any more of your time. But I should have preferred hearing from you, Sir Morton, why you thought it necessary to advise Lady Drumburgh to employ a blackmail artist like Smailey."

Without giving the man or the woman an opportunity to reply Slade turned and went out, followed by Clinton and Sylvia. In the corridor the girl whooped.

"By heaven, that was slamming it home, Mr. Slade. The new benevolent fund won't get far today," she prophesied, with a little squeal of pleasure. "You've set him back months."

"I've done what?" Slade asked, surprised.

"Set him back months in his ardent wooing. The ground was clear for him to go in and win the widow and collect the boodle. How he loves the sound of Drumburgh Trust Consolidated A Stock! Well, Margaret can start thinking what it's all about. Oh, I should say you've set him back a full year. Easily."

She looked at the Yard man with large, round, bright eyes.

"So that's why I had to get tough."

"And you were — beautifully."

Something between an explosion and a cough came from Clinton. Slade glared at him.

"Well, when I see James Murchison I shall have something to tell him."

"If you're going to rat, Mr. Slade, you'd better think twice. I'd hate for you to be concerned in a murder you couldn't investigate."

This time there was no suggestion of coughing about Clinton's explosion. Slade tried to look annoyed, but the girl's bland expression of wide-eyed innocence and the friendly hand placed on his sleeve caused him to grin.

"Look," he said. "I'm going to see Sayles now. And I'm going unaccompanied."

She nodded. "Fair enough. I can take a snub when I've earned it, and I have. You won't get much out of Robert. But here's wishing you luck."

She left them, and they sought the chauffeur.

"Quite a girl," Clinton reflected.

"She's several hundred per cent more than that," Slade told him.

They found Sayles in a toolshed behind the garage. He was a youngish middle-aged man with sandy hair and sharp eyes. When Slade had explained the reason for the visit he shook his head.

"'Fraid there's nothing I can add to what I told Chief Inspector Windrop and the sergeant here," he said. "I knew of the secret pocket in the car, but I never knew what went into it. Often his lordship took the car out alone. It wasn't as if the night he—he was shot was—well, unusual, you see."

"I follow that, Sayles," Slade nodded. "But tell me, had you ever driven his lordship to the house in Moonby Street?"

"No," Sayles said, shaking his head.

"Now think carefully. Have you ever, at any time, got the impression, while driving Lord Drumburgh, that you were being followed?"

"Followed?"

"By another car."

Sayles rubbed an oily finger along his upper lip. "It's funny thing you should ask me that. I have, several times."

"Remember when?"

"Well, once when I met his train at Euston. He'd come back from a trip to the Midlands. I don't know where. But I had to drive him down to a house in Surrey, near Redhill. I remember the name. It was Thornlea. Big place, about two miles off the Brighton road."

"That the only time you remember?"

"No, there was another time, when I was driving him from a meeting in the City. That was about six months ago, I should say. The other time, when we went to the house near Redhill; that was about six weeks ago. There was one other time, but I'm not so sure about that. Lord Drumburgh had driven down to Southampton to meet a gentleman from America. But that was — oh, all of eight months ago, I should say."

"What was the gentleman's name?"

"I don't rightly recall it. But it was something like Kitmarsh or Kidmarks, or something like that."

"Did you mention this following of your car to his lordship, Sayles?"

"Once. He told me not to be foolish, and — well, I took the hint."

"But you're convinced the car was followed on these occasions?"

"When you say convinced, that's a tight word, you know." The grease-marked finger travelled along his upper lip again. "I can't swear to it, you understand. I may have been mistaken. But it was a feeling I had."

Robert Sayles could tell them little more than this, and the two Yard men left him rubbing his hands on a piece of cotton waste and looking anything but pleased with himself. Terrington's red sports car was gone from the drive when they returned to the house.

"Not quite as good as his word, friend Terrington," Slade reflected.

"Well, he never inspired me with confidence," Clinton said. "They're all a rum bunch. Except the girl. She's cut from a different roll of cloth. But I'm itching to get to Smailey's. He's another kettle of soup."

Slade glanced at his watch. "Well, we've got time for a bite, and then we'll drop in on him. He should be fairly receptive after lunch — especially if Cashern's been giving him a lot of no-good advice on the phone."

It was nearly two hours later that the Yard men climbed a flight of narrow wooden stairs in a street just off Covent Garden and passed through a door bearing the inscription "Smailey's Private Inquiry Agency — Frederick Smailey in Charge." They entered a dingy office that badly needed fresh air and, to the young woman polishing over-long fingernails at a tiny telephone switchboard, presented a card that caused her to push her hennaed curls out of her eyes and waggle her hips towards an inner door.

She returned after a bare minute's interval to announce nasally, "Will yer coom this way, please?"

Once through the door, she closed it after them.

"Well, and why do I get this pleasure?"

Slade nodded to the man who had risen from a scarred, cigarette-burned desk that not many months before had stood on a Tottenham Court Road pavement gracing the entrance to a second-hand furniture store. Like the desk, the man was second-hand. He had been through the mill, and wore all the signs of a hard grind.

"I wanted a few words with you, Smailey," Slade said. "Mind if we sit down?"

"Make yourselves at home. What's it all about? You know I've got to respect my clients' wishes."

"That's up to you, Smailey. You can talk or you can refuse."

"And if I refuse?"

"You won't be doing yourself any good," Slade said smoothly.

Smailey sneered, "I'm not so damned sure I'd be doing myself a favor if I spilled anything. But Yard Superintendents don't come slumming unless it's something in a special class, and my business isn't that big. So what's the big idea?"

"I thought Morton Cashern had tipped you off."

Smailey laughed thinly. "I don't work for financiers. Any way, in my business I'm more likely to get work from their wives, and you know it."

"All right, you've done your best, Smailey. Now let's stop fencing." Slade leaned forward. "Who paid you to tail Drumburgh? His wife or Cashern?"

"I'm not fencing. Don't get the wrong idea. But I've got my clients to think of."

"And yourself. Don't forget him, Smailey. He should come well up in the list."

"All right, the same old stuff. I've got nothing to thank the Yard for except a lost pension. If ever a man was done dirt —"

"Save the autobiography, Smailey," Slade advised. "You'll make more on it elsewhere."

Smailey scowled. "And the same old technique. Once a man's down, kick him — hard. All right, let's get this business over. My time's not so damned cheap as you seem to think."

Slade grinned.

"I don't think it's cheap when you've got clients like Cashern. Did he hire you?"

"You can't compel me to answer that question," Smailey retorted.

"True, I can't," Slade agreed. "But if I can prove you were monkeying about following Drumburgh on the night he was murdered, Smailey, you'll get sick so bad nothing a doctor can give you will be any good. Think it over."

The ex-Yard man had something to chew. He got up and took a turn about the room, his hands pushed deep into the pockets of his trousers. He was uneasy, on the point of talking, Slade saw, yet had not reached the stage where he felt he had to surrender what he pretended were business ethics.

Slade gave the screw another half-turn.

"Don't forget, Smailey, anything to do with Drumburgh reaches pretty high. He's been responsible for a lot of things. A lot of people are interested. You could put yourself in a very bad spot with the Home Office."

Smailey cracked.

"Hell, you don't have to tell me all that! I know. The papers have been pushing it down every one's neck. He was a big cheese. But get this straight. I had nothing to do with cutting down his shout. What's more, I'm in the clear, and you know it. You're bluffing. You can't prove a damned thing. You can't—"

He was bolstering himself up. Slade took a chance.

"Suppose," he said slowly, "I could make it stick that you were in Moonby Street on the night Drumburgh was shot?"

Smailey was by the window, facing them. He stood very still at Slade's words, and the confidence oozed from his face. He grew visibly haggard as they watched him. He stared at the two Yard men as though he would read what was in their minds.

He pulled himself together with an effort.

"I—"

He was about to make a denial. That was patent to both Slade and Clinton. But before he could frame the words he changed his mind, came to a fresh decision. From his expression the decision was not one that gave him any pleasure.

"All right. I was watching him."

He came and sat down in his chair, and faced his visitors

with a show of aggression. His chin came out.

"What about it?" he challenged.

"The Cabinet's interested in this murder. Chances are the stakes were high—"

But Smailey looked suddenly relieved.

"Don't make me laugh," he drawled. "If the Cabinet's got a taste for divorce-court stories, all right — then there's something in what you say. Drumburgh was playing deep with the Burgoyne woman. He was paying her plenty of cash. That adds up one way. His wife was on to him. And Cashern was — let's say an interested spectator. But I'm not paid to go around guessing too much. I'm paid to get evidence. I get it."

He sat back, breathing easily.

Slade said, "The way you play divorce-court Sherlock might be dangerous."

Smailey sat upright.

"What're you driving at? No one's got a squeak coming. Get this — I only find what there is to be found. If it's not to be found I'm out of luck. Of course," he sneered, "it's a job that wouldn't suit some people's manicured hands. But I've got a taste for jam on my bread. And every once in a while I like to change the flavor of my jam. So what the hell?"

"Smailey," Slade told him, "you're still fencing, and you're making me tired. We're not getting anywhere. You're talking too much, and saying nothing. My advice is get the story off your chest, let's have the truth —"

Smailey broke in, angry again.

"Look here, Slade, you can't walk into my private office and start bullying me. If you think you can you're mistaken. I'll go to the witness box first, and what I'll have to spill will —"

"On oath," Slade reminded him gently.

Smailey subsided, glaring.

"There are features of this case which might, in the national interest, mean a secret inquiry," Slade informed him. "But I don't suppose I'm telling you anything, Smailey. You've a long nose, and you've always known how to use it to your own advantage."

Smailey thought things over, and made a show of capitulating.

"Very well," he said, "I don't want to get my neck in a vise. I was paid well, and told to get evidence. I kept tabs on Drumburgh. Nothing more. And that wasn't hard, take it from me. He went about a lot, but it wasn't hard to keep behind him. I got all the necessary dope about the Burgoyne woman. That wasn't quite so easy. He was paying her by the month. But don't ask me how I got that. I'm not telling. Anyway, you can check through her bank. But this is the funny part, and it doesn't seem to make sense. So far as I can tell there was just nothing in it. I mean he and she—well, it wasn't a love-nest they were sharing, or anything like that."

He made a sweeping gesture with his arm, as though he had finished his story.

"What do you know about her?" Slade asked.

"About as much as you, I should say," Smailey countered. "I did a bit of digging. Turned over a few spadefuls, and found out she's Lottie Desmond. Not that that means a thing today. I hunted around for Burgoyne. He's generally believed to have died abroad somewhere years ago. He divorced her, citing an unknown correspondent, and the case wasn't defended. The case made a lot of smell back in the old days of the last war. I know there's a boy. Peter Burgoyne. He went through Cambridge and is away somewhere. I don't know where. I've tried to find out, but it takes time—even for me," he added, grinning.

"That the lot?"

"Every bit. I got five hundred and expenses for digging it up. I'm being frank with you, Slade. I don't want to slip up over this thing. And thinking over what you said, I'm inclined to think you're right. This Drumburgh business could be troublesome. Cashern named the figure, and you know when he talks money is speaking, and money talks with a long tongue in his language."

"Now think carefully, Smailey. I'm not asking what you know, but what you might have suspected, and I'm trusting that long nose of yours."

"I bet it's something fruity. Let's have it."

"Is there anything between Cashern and Lady Drumburgh?"

Smailey grinned.

"So you want the nuts picked out of the *gateau*, huh? Well, there could be. Again, there may be nothing to it. I find it doesn't usually pay to get wrong notions about my clients. They don't stay clients, and then I'm out of pocket."

"Cashern has been a useful client in the past, then?"

"That's jumping to conclusions, and you don't want me to advise you not to get out of step, Slade. But for my part—well, I've shown I don't want to be difficult, haven't I? I can cooperate. Yes, I've done inquiry jobs for him in the past. No names, of course, no pack-drill. Too risky for me, and though you and Clinton there can laugh your heads off, it still remains a fact I can't run this business without some — yes, damn you, principles."

Both Slade and Clinton were grinning broadly. Smailey looked rather comical at that moment.

"I give my clients a square deal," he protested lamely. "That's understood. Cashern's no chicken-feed merchant, either. It pays to keep in with him. Anyway, it pays me. See?"

"I see all right," Slade told him. "Let's get to the night Drumburgh was murdered."

Smailey flinched at the word. He reflected, and said, "He'd been to the house in Moonby Street before. Several times. Usually stayed about an hour. And on nights when the maid was out. Oh, it was all very circumspect—so far as I could gather. A couple of old pals chinning together. But the nasty-minded public wouldn't believe it, would they?"

"Skip it," Slade advised.

Smailey bit back a sharp retort. A glance at Slade's impatient face warned him that it wouldn't be wise.

"All right, then. I tailed him to Moonby Street. I parked where I could see the red light of his car. I was there about half an hour when a man came up the street. He looked round once or twice, then came up to me. I was sitting at the wheel, away from the curb. He comes round, leans forward, and pokes a gun under my nose."

"What sort of gun?"

"It looked like a thirty-eight automatic."

"Not a tommy-gun?"

"Hell, no. He just takes it out of his pocket like I'd take a case of cigarettes. He's quite calm and taking his time. Hadn't got blood pressure, and there wasn't any sign he was walking in his sleep, either. Then he gives me a jolt. He says, speaking in a low voice I can't recognize, 'Start up and pull out of it, Smailey. You're in the way. Keep moving and don't forget to keep your mouth shut.' I didn't stop to argue. That's just the sort of trouble I like to keep out of. I was on my own, and this monkey meant business. He had the stamp and the authentic touch. I played safe."

Slade looked hard at Smailey and decided that, although the man was as slippery as a greased eel, he was telling the truth. He was still scared, although he tried not to show it. He was afraid, and his fear would not leave him.

"So you left."

"I did. I started the car and drove out of Moonby Street and round into Piccadilly, and little Freddy was quite ready to call it a day."

"You told Cashern?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He didn't ask, and I saw no reason to let him think I'd slipped up on a job. With you it's different."

"You didn't think to come round and report what you knew earlier?"

"I thought to, and I thought a second time. I read once second thoughts are best, Slade."

The Yard man passed that over as the best expedient.

"Did you recognize this unknown who held you up?"

"To my knowledge I'd never clapped eyes on him before, and I wouldn't know him again if he came up and shook hands with me."

"Why, scared?"

"Plenty, and I don't mind admitting it. But it also happens to be true that I didn't see his face. He'd got his head sunk down with his coat collar turned up, and he stood with a street lamp at the back of him so that his face—what there was of it—was in shadow. I got the impression of a blur, and a couple of pretty snapping eyes, and that's all. I bet even his voice would sound different on his next showing."

"Was there any other car in the street?"

"Only Drumburgh's. A taxi drew up lower down the street—oh, a quarter of an hour, I should say, before this man came up to me. Someone got out. I don't know whether it was a man or a woman. Whoever it was went into a house about six doors away from the Burgoyne woman's house. Can't see how that could mean anything."

"What did Cashern tell you to do about the boy?"

"Mean Peter Burgoyne? Nothing. But you're getting this thing lopsided. Cashern doesn't tell me what to do. She does that — Lady Drumburgh. Get that bit right. Cashern pays the expenses, she gets the dope. I'm not kicking at that setup, and I haven't been told to lay off yet. However, there's one tip I can give you — just between friends."

Slade almost lost his temper, but not quite. He let Smailey get away with it, just in case the tip was worth while.

"Well, what is it?"

"I got orders — yes, orders, Slade — right from the start, not to let the daughter tumble to what I was doing. What's her name — Sylvia? Yes, it's Sylvia."

"Those orders were from her mother?"

"No. That was Cashern's contribution."

Slade rose from his chair.

"All right, Smailey," he said. "When I've gone, sit down and start thinking over what you haven't told me. Get that spade you referred to and dig some more dirt over, and let me have what you turn up. Then, if anything breaks the wrong way for you, I'll have a statement to show that you were co-operating. Come on, Clinton. We're finished here, I think."

Whether Slade meant it or was bluffing the sergeant was not sure. However, before Slade could reach the door Smailey had jumped up and sprung forward.

"You don't think I had anything to do with the shooting and the missing papers?" he shouted.

Slade turned.

"What's this about missing papers?"

Smailey made an impatient gesture. "All right, Cashern's told me some of it. I had to know. He didn't want me to trip up, did he?"

"Interesting," Slade observed.

But Smailey was quick with a denial.

"Oh, no, it isn't. Don't get any wrong ideas about it. It's just that — well, I was a bit quick for Cashern, let's say. I overheard something he said to Lady Drumburgh, and I had a word with Sayles, the chauffeur. He's close-mouthed, and I didn't get far with him, but I can add two and two together. The special key. The missing dispatch case, and dispatch cases have papers. The only papers Drumburgh would be interested in would be pretty hot. I'm not bluffing now, Slade. I've got a good idea what you meant about the case being heard in private. I bit it. Well, I'm not being roped for something I didn't do. So here's something I won't put down on paper, but you can have it gratis for what it's worth."

They went back to their chairs. Smailey was pushing a hand through his hair and ruffling it. He looked like a man who is very upset about something. He kept wiping his lips with his tongue, and his manner was nervous.

"Well?" said Slade.

Smailey dropped his elbows on the desk in front of him and rested his chin in his hands.

"Cashern's dickering with Oscar Sharpoll, and you don't need me to tell you Sharpoll's spent his life fighting a losing battle with the Tanthorn companies. Now he's maneuvering to break the Drumburgh organization. That's barroom gossip in the city. But I got on to Cashern's part when I was checking one or two people he was contacting."

"Are you trying to suggest that Cashern would have been interested in getting those papers from the car, Smailey?"

The man propping his head in his hands wiped his mouth with a curving forefinger.

"I'm trying to suggest nothing — trying very hard, Slade. At the same time I'm trying to give you the right slant. I don't want you coming back at me and saying I stalled when I could have helped. I don't want that," he insisted.

"You won't get it if you play straight," Slade told him. "But you've got a foxy reputation, Smailey. I'm telling you nothing when I tell you that."

"This is a difficult game, and there's a lot of ways of playing it, and only one right one." Smailey cleared his throat as his voice grew hoarse. "I can't throw a client to the hounds, Slade. You know that. It's up to you to start theorizing about Sharpoll. His outfit is tough; their methods are tough. I've met some of the fighting cocks in that nest. They've got high combs and strong wings, and they fly far."

Slade realized that Smailey, under a pretense of helping, could be handing them a beautiful herring of an almost scarlet tinge.

"This really is the lot, then? Don't drag me back from the door a second time."

Smailey fidgeted, dropped his hands away from his face, and made a tired gesture.

"There is one other thing. Frankly I didn't want to mention it. I — Well, I don't see that it can mean anything to you. But it's the only thing I've held out on."

"I'll listen, Smailey."

"I got a call from Cashern, asking me to drop in at his flat. I did. He had a little job lined up which he didn't want to do himself. Damned if I can see why, but he didn't. Seemed almost nervy about it, in fact. That's what struck me as funny. He had a package which had to be sent by train to Salchester —"

Slade leaned forward.

"Sure of that — Salchester, I mean?" he asked quietly.

Mention of the name recalled to mind the map unrolled on the desk in Drumburgh's study. The private road leading to the secret plant opened from a highway running to Salchester.

It could be coincidence. It could be something else.

"Never surer of anything," Smailey said. "He told me the

train would be met at the other end and the parcel picked up. Now, this sounded very simple, and just because of that I was curious. Get me? I like knowing what goes through my hands. If I'm asked to touch dynamite I want to know how long the fuse is."

"So you took the package, and before putting it on the train peeped inside."

Smailey grinned tightly.

"I did, and I could have saved myself the trouble. Of all the damned things—it was a picture."

Slade grinned back.

"Nice of you to save a liqueur to go with the coffee, Smailey," he said.

"Mean to say this adds up to something?" Smailey pretended to be surprised.

The grin slipped from Slade's face. "Listen, Smailey, you know the picture was of a woman staring through a window at a red sky. And you peered at the artist's name through a lens. You wanted to make very sure you weren't wrong when you read it. After you'd decided what the name was, and that you couldn't possibly be mistaken, although there was a blob after the final *e*, you tried to work out what it all meant. You tried hard, but you didn't get anywhere. You were very disappointed, Smailey. So disappointed that you decided, just now, and in a hurry, to tell me. Right?"

Smailey looked as though he wanted to be sick in a dark corner.

"You're tougher than I thought, Slade. Hell, you've got to look at it my way, see how I'm placed—"

"Why?"

"Oh—hell. Don't let's start wrangling over things. I've turned my cards face up and you've seen the whole hand now—"

"Maybe. You'd better confirm that the name was in the

bottom right-hand corner, Smailey, and that it was Julian Burgoyne's."

"Yes, I confirm it, if it makes you any happier. I thought it was Julius Burgoyne at first, and it was only after I put a glass over the name I made out it was Julian."

"Who was it sent to?"

"Peter Burgoyne. Can you beat it? All that secrecy and fuss, and Cashern was sending the damned picture to the artist's kid. Now I ask you, does it make sense?"

Slade saw that Smailey was genuinely interested in what to him was a mystery.

"Smailey," he said, "one day you'll stick your nose somewhere and you'll smell out something that'll give you a real headache. But I'll be fair. I'm glad you stuck it inside that parcel. I agree that it doesn't make sense—not a scrap. That's probably why it may be the most valuable thing you've told me. And now, don't forget my advice to write out something I can put in a folder and refer to later. Come on, Clinton."

This time they got to the door without Smailey jumping after them. The private agent stared after them.

The woman at the table in the outer office watched them covertly as they passed into the corridor. Slade said nothing in her hearing. In the street, after dodging a couple of frolicsome Covent Garden porters, he turned to Clinton.

"What's the big thought?" he asked.

Clinton trod gingerly round a mess of squashed fruit littering the pavement.

"Pretty clear Cashern's out to do some beat-your-neighbor stuff. But I can't fit the picture into the layout. If it had been a few thousand shares of Drumburgh stock, now, that would have meant something."

"Jail probably," Slade grinned.

Clinton grunted. "These big boys have a way of getting away with everything they touch. A few of them slip up every now and again to prove the rule, but not often enough."

Slade laughed. "Visiting a late colleague hasn't proved a tonic, has it, Clinton?"

He got another grunt, and then Clinton said, "Smailey smells, I wouldn't trust that faker any further than I could toss the *Floral Hall* over there. Now he's trying to palm himself off as cooperating with us. I suppose all that oil he gave us was just to reduce official friction, so he could still stay on the crook with *Cashern*."

"You're a bit hard," Slade chided gently. "We've nothing definite to show *Cashern's* in anything really crooked."

"I'm not so sure. *Drumburgh's* daughter gave us plenty of hints, and it was she who put us on to Smailey. According to Smailey she wasn't to find out anything about him. But she knew, all right. Then, too, how did *Cashern* get the picture?"

"From what we've seen of the *Drumburgh* household, Clinton, my guess is *Terrington*. Money, as Smailey the well-informed in these matters pointed out to us, talks with a long tongue, Clinton. A forked tongue, too, very often. On the whole, I think we've made a definite advance. But I wish I knew in which direction," Slade added, as an after-thought.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONVERGING LINES

SLADE AND CLINTON had not left the office of the Smailey Inquiry Agency more than three minutes when Frederick Smailey picked up the telephone and dialed a number.

"Put me through to Sir Morton," he told the person who answered his call.

There was a short delay, and then Cashern's voice came over the wire. It sounded faintly ringing, as though the man was excited.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Smailey here, Sir Morton. I said I'd ring you when Slade had gone."

"Then he came, eh?"

"That bird doesn't lose any time. I kept pretty close, as you told me. On the other hand —"

Smailey hesitated purposely.

"Well, what is it, man?"

"Just this. I don't want to get in Dutch with the Yard. If they find out just what I was up to, snooping about in Moonby Street on the night —"

"Don't forget you're on the phone, Smailey. This line isn't private."

Smailey smiled at the advice. He knew just how much he was going to say on a line that wasn't private.

"No," he said, "but I'd like your assurance, if anything happens."

"What could happen?"

Smailey's smile became twisted as he looked at the chair where a short while before Slade had sat and asked a lot of difficult questions.

"Well, if there was something in that parcel that would interest Slade, and he questions the Peter Burgoyne to whom it was addressed — "

Smailey waited. The man at the other end of the line was silent for some moments, and Smailey thought he had cut off, but he came over the wire, saying, "What's on your mind?"

"This isn't a private line, Sir Morton," Smailey reminded him.

"All right. Six-thirty tonight, and don't be late."

Smailey smiled again as he dropped the receiver in its cradle. But he was the sort of man who never speaks his thoughts aloud. Too many people had done so and regretted it afterwards. Smailey did not like having regrets.

He would have been surprised, and perhaps his smile would not have been quite so pleased, had he listened in to the telephone conversation following immediately upon his call. Cashern put down the receiver, held it in the cradle for a moment or two, then picked it up and dialed another number.

"Finch," he said when a voice he recognized spoke, "put me through to Mr. Sharpoll. This is Cashern. Tell him it's important."

"Very good, Sir Morton," said the man who answered to the name of Finch.

There was a short delay, and then Finch said, "I'm putting you through now, Sir Morton." The line buzzed and clicked, and then out of a deep silence came a reedy voice, faintly querulous.

"What is it, Morton?" it asked. "I'm tied up just now, and very busy. But Finch said it was important. If it can possibly wait, please — "

"I've had Smailey on the line. He's had a visit from Superintendent Slade of the Yard, Oscar. I think he's getting jittery."

"Well, pay him off. He can't be of any use now."

"I'm not so sure."

"Then don't pay him off. Keep him on. Only make your mind up, for God's sake, Morton. I can't stay here all day while you make up your mind."

"It's no use getting fretful, Oscar," Cashern said, snapping back. "We're in too deep—"

"What do you mean we? Speak for yourself, Morton. If you've acted rashly in any way, then you've acted for yourself. You know our arrangement very well. It still stands. Unless you want to break off—"

"No. No, of course not." Cashern's mouth drew thin. He knew very well that Oscar Sharpoll was smiling sardonically at the other end of the line, and cursed silently. Sharpoll was too damned smart to lend a helping hand. "Listen, Oscar," he said, "I can't be too sure of Terrington. That's where the shoe pinches. From what Smailey told me Slade's getting a bit too warm to be comfortable. I'm not sure Terrington won't go back on us."

"He'll regret it if he tries to double-cross me, Morton. Tell him that if you think it'll do any good. I'm not doing anything at this stage. I'm leaving it to you. Obviously I can't come out into the open at this time. I don't want Drumburgh stock to get unsteady. That wouldn't do any of us any good — would it?"

Just like Oscar, always had a ready answer for keeping himself safe and out of the limelight when he felt it to be better off the stage. Cashern was annoyed, but did not dare to show it. He knew that Sharpoll had the whip hand, and he knew, furthermore, that Sharpoll knew it.

"No, Oscar, you don't have to worry. Leave it to me. But I want you to know how things break. That's all."

"Quite enough too," said the querulous voice. "Mind, Morton, if anything goes wrong—you're on your own. You get your share when everything's fixed. Not before. Don't make any mistake."

Again the line went dead. Cashern hung up. He felt angry. He had been unsettled since the moment he had heard the door slam behind the departing Yard men. He sat down, removed the monocle from his eye, and returned it to its waistcoat pocket.

After a while he picked up the phone once more and spun the dial.

"Arthur?" he said to the man who answered. "Yes, it's Morton. You went off in your car. I saw you before I left. Yes, I know. Where—"

He listened to Arthur Terrington's voice crackling in the microphone at his ear.

"Very well," he said, "I understand. But listen, Arthur. Sharpoll is playing safe, and I've no intention of being thrown to the wolves. Someone's playing damned clever. The papers are still missing. You know what that means. No, I never mentioned the murder. But—"

Again Terrington's voice crackled, like buckshot rattling against corrugated iron.

Cashern broke in with, "Look here, I'm getting Smailey to come round at half-past six. Maybe you'd better be here too."

However, Terrington proved he was every whit as cautious as the others Cashern had dealt with, and he quickly vetoed the suggestion.

"I don't think that would be wise," he said. "Smailey, from what you've told me, is a shrewd bird. That's why you hired him. If he got to know too much, or even suspect—

well, it wouldn't do either of us any good. Don't you agree?"

Terrington knew enough about Cashern to know that he would agree to that. But he didn't know just how concerned Cashern was for his own safety.

"True, Arthur. But we must have a talk soon, and I thought that, if Smailey's coming here anyway, then —"

"How about if I come after he's gone?" Terrington said, thinking up a swift compromise.

"Well —" Cashern demurred.

"It would be safer. It isn't as though I can come out and talk to him. You'd have to tell me yourself, in any case, what he said."

Cashern gave way.

"All right, then," he said, but he sounded reluctant. "I'm uneasy, Arthur. Damned uneasy. Oscar Sharpoll hasn't said a word about the papers, and Smailey . . . My God, if I thought that he . . . But no, he wouldn't try that stuff."

Cashern had seemingly forgotten his advice a brief while earlier to Smailey in the matter of the public line. He stood holding the instrument, agitated and frowning.

"Hullo," said Terrington. "You still there?"

"Yes, Arthur, but I'm ringing off now. Be round here — oh, any time between seven-thirty and eight. Don't put me off. I'll be expecting you."

He sat down, drumming his fingers on his knees. Again and again he turned things over in his mind, and every time he came to the end of a chain of thought he felt more worried and depressed than before.

Finally he completed the circle of phone calls by ringing Smailey.

"Smailey," he said, "this is Cashern. Tell me, what was the name of the maid at Mrs. Burgoyne's?"

With a half-smoked cigarette drooping from his slack mouth,

eyes screwed up to avoid the spiral of smoke rising from it, Smailey turned a mental somersault.

"Betty Marsh," he said.

"You know where she lived?"

Smailey stalled. "She lived with the Burgoynes, had a comfortable job, as those jobs go," he said.

But Cashern wasn't being put off in that fashion, or so easily.

"Yes, but where was her home? Was she a Londoner? That's what I want to know."

Smailey knew what he wanted to know. He wanted to know where he could get in touch with the girl, and what puzzled Smailey was why. He couldn't see any reason why Cashern should want to contact the girl. And when he couldn't see a reason Smailey at once suspected it, on general principles.

But Cashern was still paying him, and he wanted an answer.

"Yes, she's a Londoner, Sir Morton. I can get in touch with her, if you want me to."

"Damn it, Smailey, I asked you a question." Cashern was getting short-tempered. "I don't want you to contact her. I want you to give me her address — the address of her home."

Smailey couldn't stall any longer, and it would be dangerous to refuse point-blank, especially if there was nothing in it except a wild idea.

"Just a minute, I'll consult my file, Sir Morton."

He didn't consult a file. He didn't move from his chair. He just sat there smoking slowly, and thinking damned hard, but he couldn't get anything out of his thoughts that was fresh or would give him a new line in this matter.

Finally he said, "Here we are — Betty Marsh. Her home address is thirty-three Nightingale Rise, Clapham. If you want the postal area it's south-west four. That's the home of her parents. I expect she'll be with them."

Cashern said, "Thanks."

"Anything else?" Smailey asked pleasantly. "I mean I'll be pleased to —"

"Nothing else, thanks," Cashern told him shortly, and dropped the receiver.

Half an hour later he took a taxi and drove to Nightingale Rise, which was a hilly road not far from the Common. Cashern was very engrossed in his thoughts, or he might have noticed that his taxi was followed out of the West End and over Westminster Bridge and through Kennington and Stockwell by a shabby gray car, which bounced on the streetcar lines, weaved through the traffic, and somehow always managed to hang on to the taxi when the traffic lights went green.

Smailey sat at the wheel of the gray car. He wanted to know what this Betty Marsh angle meant. And he had quite naturally supposed that if Cashern was away from his flat at six-thirty, then he could not expect Smailey to remain there kicking his heels on the mat. Equally, if Cashern arrived back by six-thirty, then if Smailey stuck to him he should arrive back with him. Which seemed a perfectly natural and quite satisfactory arrangement.

Number thirty-three Nightingale Rise was a three-story house divided into flats and set back from the pavement by a wide strip of garden containing some old and much-sawed trees. Cashern paid off his taxi and knocked on the front door. A woman answered the summons. She was a woman past middle age who looked as though life had not dealt with her very leniently. In fact, life had not dealt very leniently with any of the Marsh family. They had been blitzed twice during the war years, and the boy Tom had been killed in the storming of the Rhine.

Assessing Cashern after a shrewd glance at his well-cut clothes, she let him in, and he followed her up a flight of stairs to the Marsh's not entirely self-contained flat. Seated

on the edge of one of the family's faded and patched arm-chairs, he asked the mother questions about her daughter and the woman who had employed her. Mrs. Marsh had little to offer in the way of conversation or information, and Cashern felt that he was largely wasting his time. Moreover, apparently the daughter was out, keeping an appointment. He began to suspect that he had acted hastily in coming at all, for plainly the woman was curious about the purpose of his visit, and did not swallow the excuse that he thought she could give him some details about Mrs. Burgoyne's son, with whom he wished to communicate. But Mrs. Marsh was too much in awe of the clothes Cashern was wearing to suggest openly that her daughter was a nice girl, and if she had known would not have worked for a woman who had gentlemen friends on the sly. So the interview passed rather haltingly, with neither helping the other much.

"This appointment your daughter is keeping, Mrs. Marsh. Now I wonder if it is with a friend of mine. I have mentioned your daughter to several people, as a matter of fact I'm a friend of the Drumburgh family."

"Well, sir, I can't rightly say. She had a telegram this morning. It said call after lunch at fourteen Bolingbroke Square. That's up Bloomsbury somewhere. Of course, with Betty being out of work at the moment—well, naturally, she went. You see, we're not exactly fortunate in this world's goods . . . ."

Cashern hated hard-luck stories. Mrs. Marsh did not know it, but she had found the one sure method of drawing the visit to a close. Within three minutes Cashern was out of the flat and driving in a taxi eastwards. Smailey followed, curious and uneasy.

Cashern paid off the taxi just before reaching Bolingbroke Square, and walked round the rather somber quadrangle. There

were one or two gaps, where bombs during the blitz had broken the grubby symmetry of brick and cement. Number fourteen, surprisingly, was an empty house next to one of the gaps. The house had been badly damaged structurally, and apparently neither the local authority nor the owner had decided whether to pull it down or build it up.

Cashern frowned at the chipped steps, and the gaping space where a front door had been. After a hurried glance round he walked up the steps and ventured inside. The place smelled damp and stale. He looked into various rooms on the ground floor, but they merely offered scenes of undisturbed dereliction. Impelled by an almost morbid curiosity, he ventured down the short flight of steps to the kitchen at the rear. The door was half open. He pushed it, and found it impeded by some obstacle on the floor just inside. Squeezing past, he turned round, and suddenly gulped. Lying prone on the floor was the body of a girl. Some telepathic sense informed him that she was dead, and he knew, with equal sureness, that she was Mrs. Marsh's daughter.

He did not hear footsteps coming along the hall corridor, and was not aware that he was no longer alone until a hand touched his shoulder.

He turned with a start.

"I've got a car in the square, Sir Morton," Smailey said. "Better come along. This won't be pleasant, and people might get the wrong idea, mightn't they?"

Cashern didn't think about those words until he was in the car and Smailey was driving towards the West End.

"What did you mean, the wrong idea?" he asked uncertainly.

Smailey's face was a mask.

"She had been strangled. Didn't you see? Wasn't a pleasant sight, was she?"

"No, but — "

"Well, you went to her home, and then came straight here. Might be awkward if the police didn't understand. You want to be sure you've an alibi. I mean it's always safer, isn't it? You've got to think ahead."

"Of course, yes, but . . . . Damn it, Smailey, you're not trying to insinuate . . . . By God, you are! Look here, I'd have you know I'm —"

"In a bad spot, Sir Morton," Smailey assured him. "But you don't have to worry. We can work something out, and you can trust my discretion. I've proved that. You get value for money, don't you?"

"Yes, but you're talking as if — "

"Don't you think we'd better have a chat, quiet like, just the two of us?" Smailey suggested smoothly.

But he was already framing the course that chat would take, and speculating upon how much he could get for his silence.

"Perhaps we had. After all, we were meeting at six-thirty, anyway," Cashern said, snatching at a straw.

"That's right, so we were," Smailey nodded, as though it was barely possible that he had forgotten.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECRET FACTORY

SLADE AND CLINTON missed the news of Betty Marsh's murder by half an hour. Scotland Yard received a telephone call from an unknown caller using a phone-box in Piccadilly Underground station. The caller said he knew that a girl's body was lying in the shell of number fourteen Bolingbroke Square. He omitted to mention his name, was on the line only a matter of forty-five seconds, and promptly disappeared into the vast concourse of people thronging the environs of the station at the evening rush hour. There was a chance in a million of tracing him.

When the call came through Slade and Clinton were leaving Euston, bound for Salchester. Slade had had a concentrated session with Windrop, and a new plan of operations had been mapped out.

On the train the two Yard men continued the discussion that had been terminated when Windrop left Slade's office. Clinton had something worrying him, and in characteristic fashion aired it.

"If Smailey got the picture on the train — and there's no reason to suppose he didn't — then it was picked up last night by Peter Burgoyne."

Slade looked at the other.

"Go on, Clinton," he invited.

"This is the bit that's puzzling me," Clinton said. "Only a few days ago he got back from his mother's funeral. That was in the report Superintendent Larkins gave you. Salchester is

the largest town in the same area as this secret factory of Drumburgh's — ”

“You're getting warm. Don't stop.”

“Well, to me it begins to look as though young Burgoyne might have known of his mother's friendship with Drumburgh and didn't approve. He got close to Cashern, who agreed to send him the picture — ”

“It isn't hard to change the focus, Clinton,” Slade interposed. “One could say that it looks as though Burgoyne was given a job in his factory by Drumburgh because he was taking an interest in him. Almost, one might say, a fatherly interest, Clinton.”

The sergeant turned in his seat and gave Slade a sharp glance.

“Add the fact, as Smailey informed us, that Drumburgh was making her an allowance — the mother, I mean,” he said. “Then it looks like we've got a slipknot round something.”

“True, Clinton. But we're only guessing,” Slade reminded him. “Those letters she kept in the bureau tell a story, but not all we want to know. They tell us she and Drumburgh were — well, extremely friendly, back in the days when he was plain Mr. Chawson. But they're not the usual bundle of mawkish vaporings that most women keep for sentiment's sake. Carlotta Burgoyne must have been a rather extraordinary woman, Clinton.”

Clinton, a married man, smiled to himself at this evidence of a bachelor's blissful illusions.

“I think there's another extraordinary woman we've got to take into account,” he said.

“The sprite-like Sylvia?”

“Eh? No.” Clinton shook his head. “Nothing sprite-like about the one I'm thinking of. That red-haired mama in Smailey's outer office.”

Slade grinned. “Straying eyes, eh, Clinton?”

From long association with his superior the sergeant was able to act natural.

"Straying eyes nothing," he grunted. "I was nearest the door, wasn't I? I say Smailey's a lousy psychologist if he imagines that yard and a half of skirt uses lipstick for glue. I bet she could unbutton and tell every word that was said in his office. She doesn't dress that mop of hair behind her ears for nothing. Her ears aren't her best bits, anyway."

"Still the old thought for detail, I see," Slade remarked with a straight face. "Well, it won't be long before we see Murchison and Burgoyne. We know Murchison's a good engineer, and from those letters and papers of his mother's we know the boy took an engineering degree at Cambridge and spent some time at the Cavendish Laboratory. I'm hoping we can learn something useful from them."

Slade had telephoned the Superintendent of the Salchester police before leaving London, and accommodation had been booked for the two Yard men and a car was waiting for them at the station when they arrived in the city.

The Superintendent was there personally to meet them. A stoutish man of medium build and somewhat aggressive presence, burdened by the unusual but descriptive name of Duckbott, he took his fellow-men very seriously, and Slade and Clinton more seriously than most. Which, to all who have made the acquaintance of Samuel Duckbott, is saying a great deal.

His greeting was warm. He had, in the normal course of duty, been apprised of Slade's promotion and of his intended liaison work with the provincial police forces, and this was the first time he had met the Yard man.

"It's a pleasure," he assured Slade.

But his searching curiosity dried at its source when Slade made reference to the Drumburgh case.

"I can't say I haven't been expecting you," he said, "but now you're here I'm glad to unload the job at this end. I can guess it's the factory that's brought you, but of course I've got nothing to turn over. I've fixed rooms for you at the Rosemount. It's quiet, but the food's good, and I live only a few streets away, if you want me. Will you be staying long?"

"I hope not—if you won't take that the wrong way," Slade smiled. "I plan to be at the factory tomorrow morning early, and with luck in London tomorrow night."

"Bit quick, but I can imagine what you're up against, Slade. Er—it's too late to do much tonight, but if you care to come home with me, I'm sure—"

"Very nice of you, Duckbott," Slade thanked him. "But Clinton and I have had a long day, and there are several things we must run over together, and I want to phone the Assistant Commissioner, so if you don't mind—some other time, perhaps, when things are—"

"Well, I'll leave the car for you at the Rosemount garage. If there's anything else you want first thing in the morning, don't forget to let me know."

Slade promised to worry the friendly Duckbott if his wants were not all supplied. The local man left them after introducing the new arrivals to the manager of the Rosemount, and Slade and Clinton had a meal in their room and went right to bed.

The next morning Slade drove out to the factory. He followed a map he had brought from London, and some eight miles or so out of Salchester rounded a bend and was confronted by an old war-time notice that had not been taken down. It read: "Halt. Dangerous to Proceed." The notice was placed at the entrance to a typical country lane, with unkempt hedge-rows stretching away on each side towards a grove of trees breasting a small hill.

Slade turned down the lane. He drove for about a couple

of hundred yards when he came to an iron gate closing the lane. As he braked, a man appeared. He wore a sort of uniform in navy blue, with peaked cap and Sam Browne belt.

"Passes?" he inquired.

The Yard men held out the passes Terrington had given them. The gate-man took his time examining them and presumably dividing the serial numbers by seven. When satisfied that he was dealing with a couple of bona-fide visitors and not trespassers, he handed back the passes with a muttered, "O.K. Show them at the next barrier, other side of the trees."

He unlocked and swung back the gate. Slade drove through, and, glancing back, had a view of the gate-man relocking the gate.

The lane led up a hill, wound between the trees they had seen from the main road, and dropped down the other side. They came to another barrier. This one comprised two locking gates, with a couple of gate-men, dressed in similar uniform to the man they had already encountered.

Again the passes were examined carefully before they were allowed to drive on. The lane emptied quite suddenly into a wide, square clearing, in the center of which were grouped the various buildings of the Drumburgh secret experimental factory.

"Damn' well camouflaged," was Clinton's first comment.

"All the same, the Hun banged it about several times," Slade said. "But I should say it's difficult to pick up from any real height."

At that moment what looked like a miniature Bren carrier appeared between two of the buildings, twisted on caterpillar haunches, and suddenly spun forward over the soft ground towards the Yard men's car. It was remarkably silent for a vehicle of such design. It reared up and halted, and from its interior poked a smiling face covered with freckles and crowned with a shock of bright red hair.

A cheery voice hailed the visitors. "What d'you think of my secret weapon?"

Slade and Clinton got out of the car.

"You forgot the oil can," Slade suggested.

The freckled man laughed. He appeared to be a little over thirty, and his eyes were intensely blue.

"That's jealousy talking back," he flung at them, grinning.

Raising his hands he gripped the rim of his machine, and with an easy hoist pulled himself from the interior. With a nimbleness that told of athletic training he dropped to the ground.

"That's the latest thing in fire fighting," he said seriously. "She's got everything. I was working on her when the war ended, trying to rush her to perfection. But she took her time, drat her. Wouldn't be rushed. Well, she was worth it. She's got everything. Speed — yes, and she's noisy when you let her out, and that's as good as an alarm bell, anyway — and there's a full equipment tucked away in her innards, including foam for fighting an oil fire. She'll go over anything, like a cat. She even packs a telescoped escape ladder that's quite a gadget. I reckon she'll do well when we get her in production."

His gaze came away from the novel fire engine, and he glanced at the newcomers.

"But you want someone?" he asked, and his former easy manner was replaced by a keenness that Slade mentally approved.

"I'm from Scotland Yard," Slade said. "I've come to see —"

"Me, I guess," said the freckled man. "I'm Murchison. Had a call from Terrington. He told me to expect you. Perhaps we'd better go through to my office."

He rubbed his hands on a piece of cotton waste, flung it inside the turret of the fire-engine, and led the way across the gravelled drive to the nearest of a group of squat one-story

buildings. Plaster walls painted an apple green provided pleasing corridors. From somewhere in the other buildings came the hum of machinery. The only noise in the building the Yard men entered was the clacking of a speeding typewriter.

Murchison pushed open a door with his name on it, and waved his visitors inside. He drew up a couple of chairs before a small desk covered with papers, and lowered himself into another chair on the other side of the desk.

"I know this isn't a joy ride, gentlemen," he said, coming straight to the point after Slade had made his introductions. "Those papers were vital to the work we're doing here. What a lot of people don't know — I don't believe Terrington does, though he manages to pick up most things" — he grinned — "is that some last-minute alterations were sketched out on one of the papers Lord Drumburgh had with him. It's going to be a great nuisance if we don't get those papers soon."

"Have you any idea who would be interested to get those papers, Mr. Murchison?" Slade asked.

The other smiled.

"I could name two hundred people, and still have a plentiful reserve," he said.

"You've had no trouble here at the factory?"

Murchison shook his head.

"No, I can't say we have. But then we've taken every precaution. You must realize that. It would be difficult for anyone outside to start any mischief here."

"And the staff?"

"Every man and woman vouched for. I know their records personally. We haven't taken any chances. We couldn't afford to, Mr. Slade."

"That includes Peter Burgoyne?"

Murchison looked surprised.

"Oh, so you're interested in him, are you?"

"In a general sort of way," Slade told him. "In the same sort of way I'm interested in you, Mr. Murchison."

The other nodded.

"Of course. May I ask why?"

"You're friendly with Lord Drumburgh's daughter. In fact, she's friendly with you, and of course you can see that anyone —"

"Just a minute, Mr. Slade. I didn't want Drumburgh's cash or his credit. He hired me because I know my stuff. If I didn't I shouldn't be sitting in this office talking to you now. He knew how I felt about his daughter. She was in this place during the war, doing a pretty good secretarial job. Then when the big show was over her father wanted her home."

"I see. Thank you for telling me, Mr. Murchison. Anything you can add about Burgoyne —"

Again Slade was interrupted. This time when Murchison held up a hand.

"Hold on, Mr. Slade. I take it you know he's disappeared?"

A glance at Slade's face, however, showed that the information was news to the Yard man.

"Oh, I see, so you didn't know. Which makes it more puzzling, in a way. You don't think young Peter —"

He paused.

"You're asking me if I think he had anything to do with Lord Drumburgh's murder, aren't you, Mr. Murchison?"

Some color flushed up under the freckles.

"Yes, I suppose so. All right, I'm sorry. Consider it unasked, Mr. Slade."

"Not at all. I'm interested in Burgoyne because I happen to know that he is a protégé of Lord Drumburgh's. That's right, I take it?"

Murchison nodded his red head.

"Perfectly. Young Peter is a lad of promise. Went through

Cambridge collecting honors, has his feet on the ground, can work — which is more than most youngsters can these days — and has some imagination to bring to what he does. The result is success. He's helped considerably in this — um — special work."

"And the special work — it's completed?"

"Practically. Give us another month without interruptions and there should be news to make people sit up and take notice."

"Er — getting back to Burgoyne, Mr. Murchison. Is there anything on the other side of the picture?"

Murchison gestured with a hand.

"He's young. All youngsters have some faults they have to grow out of. Peter's a good worker, as I said. He has no real faults — not what you can honestly call faults, I mean — but he's a bit unsteady at times."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I don't want to do him an injustice. I may be wrong, but I've had the impression — only recently, mind you, within the last few weeks — that his mind hasn't been altogether on his work. I took it to be merely a passing phase. Peter's young, and — "

"He's disappeared."

"He's absent without reason, and that's not like him. He knows the work here is pretty important, and that it must come first with all of us. We've been working at pressure, but we don't disappear."

There was a slightly bitter note in the speaker's voice as he said the last words.

"Did you speak to him, Mr. Murchison, about not having his mind on his work?"

"I did, as a matter of fact. He resented what he thought was my interference. He made that very plain. But, again, I don't want to make this into anything big. It's just something that's

cropped up while you were asking questions."

"I understand. How long has he been away from the factory, Mr. Murchison?"

"This is the second day."

"And you say without reason."

"No one here knows of any. We've tried his lodgings in Salchester. But he's not there. So as far as I'm concerned he's disappeared. There's been no phone call or letter from him, and he told no one of his going."

"Do you know if he mentioned going to collect a package from the London train the day before yesterday?"

"Not that I know of. What sort of package? I mean, nothing that could interest anyone here, was it?"

"I don't know."

Murchison shrugged. "You know what you're after, Mr. Slade. Any way I can help, just call on me. But if you find Burgoyne send him back. He's a key man and we'll be feeling his absence in a few days." He hesitated, then looked up inquisitively. "Mind if I ask a personal question?"

"Go ahead," Slade invited.

"Is it your personal opinion, Mr. Slade, that he could be involved in the missing papers and Lord Drumburgh's murder?" Murchison asked bluntly. "I know I shelved the question just now. But — well, you can understand my interest."

"Indeed I can. Frankly, giving you my personal opinion, Mr. Murchison, I don't know. I'm disturbed that Burgoyne's disappeared. It doesn't look well, and —"

Slade paused as the door opened. He looked round. A man in a white linen coat stood hesitating in the doorway. He had an artist's large sheet of stiff paper, on which were a number of designs, tinted in different pale colors — red, blue, green, yellow.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Murchison. I didn't know you were engaged,"

he apologized. "I'll come back later, when you'll be free."

He was about to withdraw when Murchison rose and pushed back his chair.

"No, don't go, Knowles. It's all right. Come in. I want you to meet these two gentlemen from Scotland Yard. They're down here asking questions. You may be able to help them."

The newcomer advanced shyly, blinking behind his large thick-lensed glasses. The forefinger of his left hand toyed with a somewhat untidy gray moustache shading his narrow upper lip. There were flecks of gray in his mousy-colored hair, brushed straight back on each side of a central parting, which seemed to emphasize the high dome of his head. His slightly stooped shoulders and the knee-length white coat, with cuffs turned back from narrow, lean wrists coated with dark curly hairs, all added to the general effect of a self-effacing individual, rather shy in the company of strangers, and with not many thoughts and opinions on subjects which did not concern him directly.

"Knowles," Murchison went on, "is my right-hand man with a drawing board. He puts people's ideas down on paper, straightens them out, smooths them off, and tints them. Then we all know whether we're talking rot or not."

Knowles laughed shyly and coughed with some show of embarrassment.

"That's very nice of Mr. Murchison, gentlemen," he said, "but I can assure you his ideas need no clarifying on my part. None at all."

Murchison smiled.

"Now that we've shown, Knowles, that we've our own mutual admiration society here, perhaps you'd like to tell Mr. Slade about Peter Burgoyne."

"Peter?"

Knowles seemed a little put out by the request.

"Yes, go ahead. Here, let me take that sheet from you, man."

Murchison put the sheet of tinted designs on his desk. "There, now let's hear what you know."

Knowles stuffed his hands into the pockets of his linen jacket and blinked owlishly through his spectacles.

"Really, there's little I can tell you, gentlemen."

Clinton threw a look at Slade, as though to say, "I bet he's right, too." But Slade gave the man more encouragement.

"You were friendly with Burgoyne, Mr. Knowles?"

"Well, yes, in a way. He was interested in art. Of course, I'm no artist, you understand. But doing a bit of brush-work, you know, people think you know a lot about art. Anyway, Peter and I were friendly enough to visit each other's rooms occasionally—"

"You lodge in Salchester?"

"Yes, not far from the road where he has lodgings. I thought he seemed a bit under the weather lately. I spoke to Mr. Murchison about it. But when he didn't turn up I got worried. I called round last night. He hasn't been there since the night before last."

Murchison glanced at Slade.

"This is news to me, too. Any idea where he's gone, Knowles?" he asked, turning back to the other.

"I've an idea he's gone to London," Knowles said. "He spoke a lot about going, and then after his mother's funeral he seemed cut up and depressed, and . . . Yes, I think he's gone to London, but I don't know what for."

He looked up, his eyes blinking.

Murchison bit his lip.

"I know what's in your mind, Mr. Slade," he said. "I saw the account in the papers this morning of that girl strangled in a London square. His mother's maid. But I tell you" — Murchison's voice rose — "I don't believe it. I just don't."

## CHAPTER VIII

### SLADE MOVES ALONE

SLADE RETURNED TO London with Clinton. He left the sergeant to continue the investigation at the factory and in Salchester, but he had serious doubts as to whether the painstaking sergeant would uncover anything that would prove in any way useful.

Burgoyne had dropped out of the picture, and the rest of the factory staff seemed almost to be living in another world. Slade had been conducted over the sprawling plant by Murchison, and had listened to the engineer's tale of pride in accomplishment. He had met a number of well-known scientists who had been happy to go on Drumburgh's payroll, knowing that their labor was in the interest of the nation as a whole. But Slade had the feeling while at the factory that he was not getting nearer to the heart of the riddle he had to solve. He was marking time, and the thought perplexed him. The case appeared to be in imminent danger of becoming stalemated.

Before leaving Salchester he had spent half an hour with Duckbott, and at the end of that time was assured that Clinton would receive all the cooperation he required while in the city.

In London he went straight to the A.C.'s office and reported. The A.C. looked grave.

"You're taking a risk playing a lone hand, Slade," he pointed out.

"It's not exactly a lone hand, sir. It's just that I'm going to investigate alone. Clinton and Windrop will be doing the same, but I don't think we shall get such good results by trailing around together. There are too many loose threads."

"All right, then. Now, tell me, what did you think of Murchison? He's keen on this atomic energy stuff, I gather."

Slade kept a straight face. The A.C. was human enough to do a little pumping on the side.

"He thinks we're changing to a completely new world. In a matter of a few years he sees the whole world replacing present forms of energy with atomic."

"Very pretty," the A.C. said drily. "I suppose he didn't have any figures to back up this — er — belief?"

"A few. He argued that at the time the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan Uranium 235, the American source of atomic energy cost something like thirteen thousand pounds a pound. If the cost is less than half — about six hundred pounds a pound — he thinks the world can economically go forward. He said that one pound of Uranium 235 was equal to some 11,400,000 kilowatt hours or some 1,500 tons of coal or nearly a quarter of a million gallons of petrol."

"H'm, very pretty," the A.C. repeated. "What happens to coal and petrol, then?"

"Eventually, as the price of Uranium 235 is reduced, they are replaced. Indeed, as the price comes down, so all the cheaper sources of power are replaced. Nuclear energy, he maintains, will be used for heating and lighting in the average home and for industrial power. He quoted a statement made by an American, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, that people will travel in trains and aircraft powered by plutonium."

The A.C. looked up slyly.

"Seems to me, Slade, if you've got any coal or oil shares, now's the time to start unloading. But what about this special Drumburgh formula? I thought they tackled the problem from a different angle, using gases."

"I didn't ask him to divulge any purely technical details, sir. I couldn't really have justified the request."

"No, suppose not. Well, let's hope there won't be any crooks in the world of nuclear energy, as you call it. Keep me informed how you go."

It was Windrop who started the ball rolling. He was waiting for Slade when the Yard's latest Superintendent left the A.C.'s office.

"I think I've got something," he said.

The two men went into Slade's office and sat down. Slade turned to the Chief Inspector, a competent detective who had been directly responsible for a number of executions. He was tall, square-set, grizzled, with a pair of steady gray eyes. The faintest echo of a Yorkshire accent remained in his voice, which was deep and never hurried.

"Let's have it," said Slade.

"It's Smailey. One of our men saw him in a pub not far from Piccadilly Circus a few minutes after that call came through announcing Betty Marsh's murder. He was nervous, and drank doubles, and smoked. He lit cigarettes from a pack of book matches. Look!"

Windrop took a small white envelope from his pocket. He shook it over Slade's desk. A used match stick fell out. Along the charred flat stem was the inscription, "Jinx Ginger Ale."

"Interesting," said Slade. "I suppose this is one of the matches he used?"

Windrop nodded.

"They're selling these book matches with the Jinx advertisement in most of the drinking clubs," Slade pointed out.

Windrop nodded again.

"I know. But just in case, I had the phone booth at the Underground station searched. This was found in it."

He produced a second small white envelope, tipped it up, and another match stick fell out. It was a flat stick carrying a Jinx advertisement.

"Neat," Slade commended. "But not conclusive, Windrop. As I said, these book matches are stocked by nearly all the three-to-eleven drinking clubs in the division."

Windrop smiled.

"But there's something else, something which would make it stick, I think. I've just learned that Smailey's got a summons for leaving his car parked in Leicester Square the same evening, and the time it was left unintended includes the time at which the call came through."

Slade smiled back.

"Now you've really given me something, Windrop. I think I can make him talk. Leave the matches with me. I'm going to tell him to come round. It should be an entertaining twenty minutes or so."

As Windrop went out Slade got through to Smailey's office on the telephone.

"Smailey," he said, "this is Slade. If you want to have a chance of keeping a whole skin you'd better come round and see me before I change my mind, and before you arrive don't think up any more anonymous phone calls."

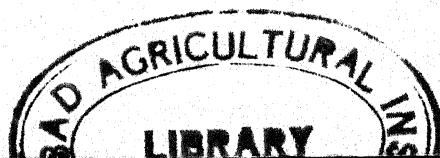
He heard the other man take a deep breath, and pushed down the receiver. Smailey was announced in under twenty minutes. He came in looking scared, and his mouth twitched.

He took one look at the match sticks on the desk, and sat down.

"This one," Slade said, pointing to the first Windrop had given him, "you left in a bar. This" — he pointed to the second — "you left in the Underground phone booth. You've also got a summons for leaving your car parked in Leicester Square. Any quarrel with those facts?"

Smailey moistened his lips, but did not trust himself to speak.

"Very well," Slade said, "let's have it. Why did you put through that anonymous call, Smailey, and how the hell did



you come to know that Betty Marsh was there, dead?"

Smailey pushed a hand through his hair.

"Look," he said, "I'm not—"

"Hold on," Slade interrupted harshly. "If you've an alibi, I'll hear it. If you haven't, don't start handing out excuses. It's too late for them. That stuff won't wash any more. I want the truth. Anything else will be silly on your part, Smailey."

Smailey drooped in his chair.

"O.K.," he said. "You've got me three ways. But if it hadn't been for the car—"

"Keep to facts," Slade cautioned. "I can put in all the asides I need."

Smailey poured out his story. Slade listened to it, looking faintly contemptuous.

"It sounds damned thin, Smailey," he told the other when Smailey came to a stop. "The only thing that makes it stand up is that I know you'd try a blackmail trick like that."

"You can't call it blackmail."

"I can call it something far worse. Maybe I will if I can prove you've been the direct cause of stopping a murderer from being arrested."

Smailey flinched as from a blow.

"Look, Slade, I knew the size of this thing the moment I saw her. That's why I made the phone call. I couldn't afford to keep it to myself. If I hadn't gone there she might not have been found yet," he argued craftily.

"If you hadn't gone there Cashern might have come straight to us. I bet if I put it to him, Smailey, he'll say you told him to keep quiet and you'd see it was all right for him. The setup was one just made-to-measure for you."

Smailey saw that his little bluff hadn't worked.

"Well, you know the lot now. Cashern didn't do it."

"How do you know?"

"You were with him that morning. He told me on the phone. Afterwards — I mean after you came to see me — I rang him up. He was home then. There wasn't time in between. And I followed him from his flat."

"So now you're going to argue you've got an alibi for each other. I don't know what you were doing in the morning."

"Why should I strangle her?"

"I don't know. You were in Moonby Street the night Drumburgh got murdered. You're always around somewhere when people are murdered, Smailey. It looks bad."

"You know damned well I wouldn't be such a fool as to murder anyone and try to get away with it."

"But you might be fool enough to let someone else do murder and try to let them get away with it, Smailey."

"I'm not an accessory before or after the fact."

"Maybe you can prove it."

Smailey seized on the chance.

"How?" he demanded.

"Remember the name of the man who held you up with a gun in Moonby Street the night Drumburgh was murdered."

"I told you I don't know him."

"That's what you told me, I know. I've thought about it since, Smailey. I think you lied. Deliberately. You lied because you're scared. You're playing a damned deep game, several ends against the middle, and you daren't let go of one for fear the others will slip through your fingers. Listen, Smailey, if you were telling me the truth about a man holding you up —"

"Before God I was."

"All right, before God you were. You said he addressed you by name."

"That's right."

"He would not have been such a fool, Smailey, unless he knew you knew him. He would have told you to clear out, but

he would not have used your name. You should have realized that when you started your little bit of embroidery."

Smailey got up, as though he could not bear sitting down any longer, and walked across the room and back to his chair.

"All right, you win, damn you," he said thinly. "The man who held me up was China Bullman."

Slade kept his gaze on Smailey. The man was foxy enough to try to cover up with an invention.

"Should that ring bells?"

"It should and it will," Smailey growled. "He's Oscar Sharpoll's shadow. Was out in the East before the war. Came from Sydney. No record here. He's slick and capable of giving trouble very efficiently."

Slade turned this over, and decided it could be. Smailey had mentioned Oscar Sharpoll, that was all. His usual pretense of telling what he knew, but in reality keeping back more than half.

"Do you think he shot Drumburgh?"

Smailey shrugged. "Does it matter what I think?" he asked bitterly. "All I'm concerned about now is that I don't get a bullet in my own back."

"How about the Marsh girl?"

Smailey shook his head.

"I don't know why she should die."

"Think again."

Smailey's face was moist. He wiped it with a handkerchief. "Well, she could know something about what happened the night Drumburgh and the Burgoyne woman were shot. She could have been threatening someone."

"Not so smart as you, eh, Smailey? So that's what you think."

"No, it isn't. It's what you wanted me to think."

"I don't follow."

"I think you do. You said, 'Think again.' You know I

haven't got a notion about her death, but I can guess, same as you. But guesses don't win tricks."

"But you've got something that'll win a trick, haven't you, Smailey?"

The other sat down heavily and leaned towards the Yard man.

"I had a visitor this morning, a young man as mad as all hell. He wanted to tear my hair out and push my face through the back of my neck. He took some handling. He'd been snoop ing about some Mayfair pubs on the quiet, and he'd come across to me with a lot of crazy notions. I had to talk fast to calm him down. At last I got him out of the office. I had some lunch, then came your call. Now you know. I haven't had time to get my ideas straightened out. Everything's the wrong way round — "

"Stop burbling. Who was this visitor, Smailey?"

"Peter Burgoyne."

"Describe him, Smailey."

The description Smailey gave tallied with the description given Slade by Murchison the previous day.

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"Think again."

"That's the truth. You can believe it or do the other thing. I'm past caring. I don't know where he's staying. I was concerned only with getting him out of the office before he got his hands on me. He looked capable of anything. If you want to know who I think killed the girl — Peter Burgoyne. I think he's off his rocker."

"All right, you don't know where he's staying. But you've an idea, Smailey, and, knowing you, I should say it's a pretty shrewd one. Let's have the idea, since you're such a stickler for the hard truth."

"He let something fall about the Brogworth Hotel. Maybe he's staying there. Maybe he isn't."

"Where's that, South Ken?"

"Somewhere round there, I believe."

"Now, Smailey, we come to a very interesting point."

The other looked surprised. "We do? What is it? I've told you everything, and you know it."

"You haven't told me how Burgoyne came to know of you and your address," Slade said.

And he knew he had scored, because that same look of frustration came to the other man's face, lending it an almost comical expression, as though he were bewildered by the loss of something valuable.

"Well, if you must know — "

"I must. Don't let's have any doubts on that score, my friend," Slade said grimly.

"—then I scribbled a brief note and sealed it in an envelope and tucked it inside the packing of the picture. I thought it might raise something. I was damn' well right. He came in and raised Cain."

"What did you say in your letter, Smailey?"

"Oh, just that if he wanted to know the truth about Lord Drumburgh and his mother I could perhaps help him in the matter. Something like that."

"By God, you like monkeying with trouble."

"I don't. I thought it would bring another letter in reply, and I'd get something that would be useful for dealing with Cashern. That was all I was after. A few cheap rounds of ammunition."

"You got it, seemingly."

"What I got was a visit from a madman. He started in on me with his fists, and I had to work like the devil to stop him from wrecking the place. When I got him sitting in a chair I

told him I'd enclosed the note because I'd been working for Cashern, and it occurred to me that he'd like to know what I'd found out."

"Another possible blackmail touch. Hell, Smailey, you reek!"

"You're entitled to your opinion, of course. But you're wide of the mark, I don't mind telling you."

"How?"

"Instead of me getting a chance to blackmail him, Slade, he started to work on me. It was the other way round."

Slade grinned. "By heaven, I believe you mean it."

"Mean it? Of course I mean it. That damned pup started in with a lot of accusations about me being the one to send him a lot of dirty insinuations about his mother and Drumburgh. He called the letters filth. Said they accused him of being illegitimate, and that Drumburgh was his father. The writer apparently said some unpleasant things about his mother. And that was what made him mad. He said one of the letters described the picture he had received. He knew it was a portrait of his mother, painted by the man he'd always supposed was his father — Julian Burgoyne. And then the young fool collapsed."

"Collapsed?"

"Yes, he broke down and started howling like a baby. What the devil could I do with him?"

"Quite a few things, I should say, but just for the record, Smailey, what did you do?"

"I took him out and bought him some grub. That's when he let drop about the Brogworth Hotel." Smailey wiped his face again. "That's the truth, so help me."

"For your sake I hope the Recording Angel's got a note of it, Smailey. You're going to need something on the credit side when a certain day comes."

"Go to hell."

Slade's smile widened.

"And now you've decided to give up the private inquiry work, haven't you, Smailey? The risks are a bit on the heavy side these days."

Smailey stood up.

"I don't know what I'm going to do. But if I'm found with a bullet in my ribs you'll know whom to look for—China Bullman. Though I don't know, even now, how he got into the business. I reckon Sharpoll's double-crossing Cashern. I'd like to know for sure."

"I bet you would. This company you keep, Smailey, isn't calculated to promise a long life for you. When did you first meet this China Bullman?"

"Shortly before the war. I did a job for Sharpoll. He had trouble at one of his sweat-shop factories. Bullman had quite a say in what I had to do. I was glad to finish and get paid."

"And you say he's no record over here?"

"That's right—so far as I know. But I didn't get the impression he was the sort to use a tommy-gun. That thirty-eight he stuck under my nose was more in keeping with the tough Aussie I knew just before the war."

Slade let Smailey go after that. He knew Smailey wouldn't try to skip. He would lie low probably, but he would be available.

He hadn't been gone ten minutes when another visitor was announced. A Miss Sadie Ginsetter.

Slade made a guess.

"Show her in," he said.

His guess was right.

The red-haired woman from Smailey's outer office minced her way into the room and propped herself in the chair her employer had vacated only a short while before. She looked as though she had something on her mind.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BELL RINGS AGAIN

WHAT CAN I DO for you, Miss Ginsetter?" Slade asked as she smoothed the skirt of her coat.

She was ready for that.

"You can hear what I've got to say without interruption, Mr. Slade. What I've got to say is very important, I can tell you."

"Doubtless, Miss Ginsetter. But to whom — you or me?"

She blinked.

"Important to you, of course. Naturally, I don't want to get myself in trouble, do I?"

"Naturally."

"So I'm giving my notice to Mr. Smailey at the end of the week. I'm not going to lose a week's money, naturally."

"Naturally."

"But I've an idea why you're interested in him. I'm putting myself right with you before I leave, naturally."

Miss Ginsetter seemed, from her own account, the most natural of humans, but Slade had his doubts, and was tired of the reiteration.

"You have need to put yourself right with me, Miss Ginsetter?"

"Oh, I know Mr. Smailey's been playing a funny game. I don't think he's broken the law. I wouldn't stand for that, you know."

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

"But — well, if he slips up, and he's likely to — anyone

doing the sort of things he does is likely to — then I don't want to slip up with him. I've got a clean slate, Mr. Slade. True, I've been useful to Mr. Smailey on some of his cases."

"Divorce evidence?"

"Yes. But nothing the King's Proctor could object to. Don't get any wrong ideas about me, Mr. Slade. I've been no party to collusions."

Slade wondered whether she knew what she was talking about, but she seemed thoroughly assured, so he let her go on.

"You see, I'm a pretty good secretary, and I know my way around. I was one of a large family, and I just had to find out which way to walk and keep my feet dry. I can be quite useful to a man with an inquiry agency. Anyway, Mr. Smailey hasn't any complaints."

"How about when you hand in your resignation?"

"That's another matter. If he complains, I shall tell him a few plain truths. I've got them lined up. He won't be able to start any of the high-pressure stuff with me, Mr. Slade."

"I take it you mean blackmail."

"I mean what I say, high-pressure stuff. Blackmail is a word I don't like. I don't like it because once one uses it there's no way of taking it back outside a court."

"And you don't like courts, Miss Ginsetter?"

"Not unless I'm taking the witness-stand with the promise of some pretty good expenses for the job."

"How refreshing."

"Eh?" She looked at him suspiciously.

Slade waved a hand. "Never mind, Miss Ginsetter. Just a passing thought. Even policemen have them occasionally. But I did promise not to interrupt what you were going to tell me, and I apologize."

"Oh, no need to. I only said that when I came in to make sure we understand each other. But I don't want to take up too

much of your time, and somehow I don't seem to have made a start. The real point is, Mr. Slade, Mr. Smailey got me to go down to a country house one week end — oh, a few weeks ago now. It was just an ordinary business week end in the country."

"I don't quite get the ordinary business week end."

"Well, I mean I was getting a country week end, but I was being paid, and I was down there to do some secretarial work for a client."

"Whose client?" Slade wanted to know.

She smoothed the skirt of her coat again.

"Well, it was this way," she enlarged. "Mr. Sharpoll was down there, and Sir Morton Cashern. You know about them because I know you saw Mr. Smailey the other day, and you had quite a session."

Slade grinned at one of Sadie Ginsetter's exposed ears, and thought of Clinton's remark apropos the lady's hair-do.

"You must have spent an interesting time in your office, Miss Ginsetter."

But she was proof against that brand of sarcasm.

"Oh, I listen at keyholes all right. Can't afford not to when working for Mr. Smailey."

"That's the way you keep your feet dry?"

"Eh?"

"You said just now . . . . Oh, never mind. Go on, Miss Ginsetter, please." Slade saw in time that he would only get the lady's fullest cooperation by taking her methods and manners seriously. "I'm grateful to you for being so frank, and of course your visit here today will be considered strictly confidential."

That was the sort of thing Sadie Ginsetter wanted to hear. The word "confidential" always gave her a feeling of pleasure, even when she knew it wasn't meant.

"Thank you, Mr. Slade. Well, as I was saying, I went down to Thornlea for this week-end —"

Slade came erect and the last vestige of his earlier bantering left him. He said very soberly, "Where?"

"Thornlea. Oh, didn't I mention it just now? Sorry. It's a big place down in Surrey. I took the train to Redhill—or was it Reigate? Funny, I always get those two places mixed up. They're just like twins to me. I'm always confusing one with the other. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I was picked up by a car, and taken to the house. Lovely place, lying back from the Brighton road. Sir Morton was there, and Mr. Sharpoll, and another gentleman. An American. A Professor Kindermart. I had to take notes of discussions for Sir Morton Cashern. I was supposed to be his secretary."

"I see. Smailey couldn't turn up and play the part, so you did."

"Something like that, I suppose. Anyway, I had a nice time. I don't know a thing they were talking about, except that they were going to do away with coal and steam and petrol, and even electricity. It sounded like a lot of nonsense, but this Professor Kindermart—he was pretty hot with it all. And another thing, he told them about negotiations he'd had with Lord Drumburgh. They got really interested at that. Then they argued. This way, that way. It might have been Thursday afternoon in a City boardroom. It seemed—of course, I may have got it wrong—that Mr. Sharpoll wanted this American professor to join a new organization in which he and Sir Morton Cashern were interested, but at the same time to pretend to Lord Drumburgh that he was considering joining him."

She stopped, as though waiting for some comment from her listener.

Slade said, "It doesn't sound to me as though you've got it wrong, Miss Ginsetter. Who owns Thornlea?"

"Well, Mr. Smailey led me to believe Mr. Sharpoll owned it. But he wasn't being quite honest."

Slade had to smile. "That too sounds plausible," he agreed. She smiled back, a rather fluttering effort that made her look strangely like an animated cartoon of herself.

"Doesn't it?" she cooed, in her best party voice.

Slade strove to get her back to a more businesslike frame of mind.

"You found out who owned this house — Thornlea, I think you said the name was?"

"I did, and really I'm not happy about telling you this, Mr. Slade."

"Come now, Miss Ginsetter, you've been very wise so far — and helpful, I may add. Very helpful."

She brightened up at that, poked at the red strands under her hat brim, and tried another smile.

"I'm glad. I want to be helpful. But this other's personal, you see."

"I'm sorry — I don't."

"Well, it's this way," she began afresh. "Mr. Bullman and I are — well, friendly. He's been very nice to me. Of course, he's not what you'd call a gentleman. He's an Australian. By that I don't mean Australians aren't gentlemen. I've met some very nice Australians — "

"Look, Miss Ginsetter," Slade said, "you're finding this part a little difficult, I can see. Perhaps I can help you."

She waited expectantly, and did not venture anything further.

Slade went on, "Mr. Bullman is better known to his acquaintances as China Bullman. They also refer to him as a strong-arm man who attends Mr. Sharpoll. He has a house in his name, but it's quite likely Mr. Sharpoll bought it, and it's in Mr. Bullman's name because Mr. Sharpoll is a cautious man by nature. Now, how does that sound?"

"You know China, then? He told me the police in this country didn't know him from Adam."

Miss Ginsetter sounded bitterly disappointed.

"We don't know him — from any record he has," Slade hastened to assure her. "But we have various sources of information, Miss Ginsetter."

He had difficulty in keeping a smile from his face as he said it.

Miss Ginsetter sniffed, only half mollified.

"I take it Mr. Bullman was at the week-end party?"

"Yes, that's right. He was very nice to me. Told me he had taken a real fancy to me, and that he just couldn't resist red hair."

She preened herself, and Slade swallowed hard, scarcely able to credit that a hard-headed young female of Sadie Ginsetter's type could get so out of character over a tough character such as Bullman appeared to be.

"I'm sure Mr. Bullman has all the Australian's well-known flair in the matter of appreciating the other sex," he said, inwardly groaning, and switched quickly to Sharpoll and Cashern. "Did this Professor Kindermart appear to fall in with the suggestion made to him?"

"Oh, yes. He took some persuading, but, if you ask me, that was only a way of beating up the terms."

The hard-headed young woman was in evidence again, and Slade breathed more freely.

"Oh, so there were terms."

"Yes, but they were discussed in private. Sharpoll was very keen that they shouldn't rush things too fast."

"Then really, what did your job amount to, Miss Ginsetter? I mean, of course, the actual work as secretary."

She thought that over.

"I had to type out some sheets of the notes I'd taken, with copies, for Sir Morton."

"So Mr. Bullman had a typewriter on the premises?"

She frowned, as though she thought that what lay behind the question was dark and intangible, and not to be trusted.

"I took my portable down with me. Mr. Smailey told me to," she said archly.

"I see. Of course. But you didn't give all the copies to Sir Morton, did you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Didn't you keep one for Mr. Smailey?"

She took her time over that one, and finally answered, "Yes. He told me to do that before I went."

"And not to let on to Sir Morton Cashern?"

"Naturally I was discreet, Mr. Slade, and Mr. Smailey was my employer. I did nothing unethical. It's because I have no wish to that I'm here now."

"And you're definitely turning in the job at the end of the week?"

"Such is my intention at the moment. You agreed that this — er — is confidential," she flushed, giving him a sharp look of doubt.

Slade nodded. "Entirely confidential, Miss Ginsetter. Now, one other little matter. Where does Mr. Bullman live when he's in London?"

Her eyes widened. "Why, you don't think that I'd — "

But Slade wasn't beginning that sort of business. He put his foot down, and kept it down.

"Miss Ginsetter, we understand each other, you and I. That is eminently satisfactory. I've told you that you've been very helpful. I'm sure you don't wish to spoil the impression you've made by being uncooperative in a small matter."

She had no alternative but to tell him what he wanted to know. But she did it with little show of grace, and it was plain that she suspected him of tricking her, though she could not quite work out the method.

"Very well," she said, making the best show of a bad business, "he's got rooms over some offices at thirty-three Bolingbroke Square. It's one of the Sharpoll companies, and if you think . . . ."

She broke off, and her eyes looked startled.

"Bolingbroke Square!" she exclaimed softly. "Isn't that where that girl — Betty Marsh —"

Slade nodded soberly.

"It is, Miss Ginsetter. Very much it is."

## CHAPTER X

### CHINA BULLMAN

SLADE ARRIVED IN Bolingbroke Square shortly after five o'clock. The evening rush hour had got well under way, and streams of office workers were making for the buses and trains. Before setting out Slade had gone over carefully the known details in the Betty Marsh murder. He had seen the telegram which the dead girl had in her handbag. It said briefly: "Be at 14 Bolingbroke Square at twelve o'clock. I can fix you up."

The grimly prophetic message had set Slade's teeth on edge. A murderer who could manage to joke at such a time was not strictly unusual, but he was definitely not normal. A mordant sense of humor is apt to betray the most careful man or woman.

But frankly Slade did not think China Bullman, from the little he knew of him, fitted into the category in which he placed Betty Marsh's killer. And he had to consider the killer of the girl as the murderer of Drumburgh and Carlotta Burgoyne.

He arrived at number thirty-three Bolingbroke Square, to find a stream of people filing down the steps. They were apparently workers from the offices of the Smentyre Engineering Products Company, which had a large gilt-lettered notice spaced over the front of the old house, long converted to other than simple domestic uses. He passed through the constantly swinging front door, to be accosted by a guardian in the shape of a small man with a peaked cap and perky manner.

"Yes, sir?" queried the little man brightly.

"I want the apartment of Mr. Bullman," Slade informed him.

The little man went up on his toes, and peered into Slade's face, as though he would memorize every feature.

"He's at the top, over the offices. Straight up the stairs. You can't miss it. Fourth floor."

Slade started up the stairs. On the fourth floor he found himself on a small landing with a narrow name plate directing him to a varnished door. On the name plate was painted in brown letters "Irving C. Bullman." There was a tiny brown arrow after the name, to make sure that a visitor did not lose his way in crossing the four feet to the door.

There was no bell. Slade banged with his fist on the panel.

He heard someone moving about in the room beyond, and presently the latch clicked, and the door swung back. A man in shirt sleeves and open waistcoat, revealing a black leather belt strapped tightly round his stomach, pushed a scowling face at the caller.

"I don't know you," he said. "What do you want?"

"A talk."

"A . . . ." The scowling face drew back a few inches. "Say, what is this, a gag? I ain't in no funny mood, mister, and you'd better not persist."

"My name's Slade," the caller explained patiently. "I'm from Scotland Yard. I want a little talk with you, China Bullman, and if you don't like the idea just say so. I'll have you picked up inside the hour."

The other man drew himself upright.

"So," he said, "the Gestapo. All right, come in. But I ain't got nothing to tell you. I work for Oscar Sharpoll, and I don't know anything about—"

"Betty Marsh's murder?"

"No, nor—"

"The Drumburgh murder?"

"Don't make me laugh—"

"Yet you were in Moonby Street the night he was shot, and you're living in Bolingbroke Square. The telegram that took Betty Marsh to her death was sent from Charing Cross Post Office. That's only a twopenny bus ride from here." Slade pursed his mouth thoughtfully. "You see, Bullman, I'm trying very hard to make you laugh. Or am I?" he asked.

The line of the man's jaw relaxed. He pushed himself back from the doorway.

"Come in," he said brusquely. "Ain't no need to spill that stuff outside."

Slade went into a small flat, composed of three rooms. He was shown into what was the sitting room. The furniture looked second hand, and the place was not clean. Tobacco smoke hung gray-blue in the air.

Slade dropped into a chair and took out his pipe. He filled it slowly, without looking at the other, who lit a cigarette with tremendous indifference. Slade waited. He wanted the other to start things. A lot might depend on that opening move.

It came suddenly. Spitting a piece of tobacco from his teeth, Bullman swung round and stuck his head forward challengingly.

"All right, so you're here. You think you've got me just because you made that damn' fool Smailey open his trap. Listen, I had nothing to do with Drumburgh's murder, nor with the Marsh girl's. I was in Moonby Street that night purely for one purpose. To see that Smailey didn't get too smart. That's the long and the short of it."

Slade puffed at his pipe.

"I think it is, Bullman. But why did Sharpoll want you there that night?"

"Don't ask me what I can't answer. That ain't smart. How do I know why Sharpoll wanted me there that night more than any other?"

Slade dissected this, and said slowly, "You mean you're in Moonby Street quite a number of nights?"

The other laughed throatily.

"I have been. I'm not now. Oscar's pretty damn' cold, but even he's got to admit it ain't the neighborhood to be in after a double murder."

"In which he was interested."

"Depends on what you mean by interested. Half the country's interested in the Drumburgh shooting. It's made a lot of headlines and been given a lot of space in the newspapers. If you mean he had a hand in it you're just guessing wild. Sharpoll saw a lot of work ruined when Drumburgh was rubbed out."

"Suppose Sharpoll denied that?"

"He would. He ain't a fool. But neither am I. I know damn' well you haven't been to Oscar. If you had he would have tipped me off, and in the second place you wouldn't be feeling your way like this. Now you haven't got a single piece of what you'd call evidence that can be made to stand up and point to me. You know it. A couple of coincidences, me being in Moonby Street and here, and that's all."

"There are a few other things, Bullman."

"Not enough to make a case, though."

"That surely would depend upon the quality of the prosecution. In a trial for the murder of Lord Drumburgh I think the prosecution would be good — too good for you, Bullman."

The other man glowered and sat down facing Slade. His long legs thrust out, as though he would push them away from his body.

"Let's quit the beefing," he said. "What do you want?"

"You know well enough. Information. Why was it necessary to scare Smailey out of Moonby Street?"

Bullman rocked his feet.

"Smailey was given the job of finding what Drumburgh was up to. He followed him about. He's pretty good at that sort of job. I've worked with him."

"I know, he told me. That was before the war."

Bullman frowned. "You've left me late on your list, haven't you?"

"I wanted something to check your story by, Bullman. I've heard you're wide."

The Australian started to smile, but thought better of it. The scowl returned to his face.

"Well, Smailey was icing in to see what he could cut out for himself. That's his racket. He's a good snoop as long as he doesn't get ideas. But when he gets ideas he's dangerous. Sharpoll had that house in Moonby Street. Got it on a short lease after being empty during the war. If Smailey found that out there would be trouble, and Sharpoll didn't want trouble."

Bullman waited, and Slade had to think fast. He recalled what Smailey had said about seeing a taxi draw up and someone get out and enter a house about six doors from the one he was watching. He tried a line at a venture.

"Where does Kindermart come in this?" he asked.

Bullman shot him a look of surprise.

"You kidding?"

"What do you think?" Slade countered.

"Very well." Bullman drew up his legs. "Kindermart had been living in the house since he decided to throw in his hand with Oscar and Cashern. Drumburgh didn't know it. But Kindermart was pretty sure we could outstrip the Drumburgh outfit technically in less than nine months."

"You mean that in less than a year the Sharpoll factories would be producing an atomic dynamo?"

"No, of course I don't. I mean that by stalling with phony negotiations Drumburgh could be held up for nine months.

In that time Sharpoll could arrange to import the product Kindermart had been interested in back in the States. Sharpoll can't manufacture on a scale to compare with the Drumburgh organization. He's not in their class. But he could try to outsmart them at a game of rigging the market. Drumburgh shares would take a beating. Sharpoll, holding the American product, could make his own terms."

A vague shape seemed to take outline and definition in Slade's mind. For the first time he saw something of the play of interests involved in the commerical war between Sharpoll and the man he had set himself to outsmart. And to Slade it looked like dirty play.

"Sharpoll visited Kindermart that night," he said.

Bullman nodded. "You mean that night Drumburgh was shot? Yes. Smailey was waiting in his car. He saw the taxi pull up. But he didn't know Sharpoll got out of the taxi, I'd swear. I'd like to know how you found out."

Slade smiled.

"I don't doubt it," he returned. "You'd probably like to know how you can get out of a mess."

Bullman looked suspicious. "What does that crack mean?"

"If Cashern is arrested he'll talk fast. If you are you'll talk —"

"You're sure of that?"

"Enough to bet on it. Terrington —"

"What about Terrington?" Bullman sat upright and flung the question sharply at the Yard man.

"He'd talk."

"And then?"

"Then Kindermart wouldn't toe the line, Bullman. His eyes would be opened. Sharpoll has put one over on him, or so it seems to me, and I think it would to him. Sharpoll's little scheme would be blown to smithereens."

The Australian's thin mouth compressed. "Where's this getting us?" he inquired.

Slade struck another match before replying and held it over his pipe, which had not been drawing well.

"To quite an interesting spot, I think, Bullman. You said Drumburgh's murder made things awkward for Sharpoll — "

"So he told me, and he sounded convincing."

"I don't doubt that. But as I see it Drumburgh's death, and the resultant confusion, could have been very useful to Sharpoll. As clouding the issue — or you can call it camouflage, if you prefer."

Bullman's face screwed up in an attempt to work out Slade's meaning. He shook his head. "I don't get it," he confessed.

"Think again. Papers disappeared the same night. Their absence is very effectively holding up Drumburgh's development of the atomic dynamo. That is playing right into Oscar Sharpoll's hands, I should say — or the hands of any bright person looking to buy time cheaply."

"I don't know anything about any papers. What papers are you talking about?"

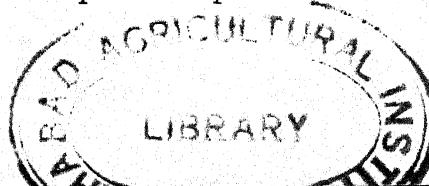
Slade looked to make sure, and was satisfied that the Australian really did not know about the papers missing from Drumburgh's car.

"Someone's been holding out on you, Bullman. Let me tell you something. A short while after Drumburgh was murdered someone — presumably the murderer — unlocked the door of Drumburgh's car and stole a sheaf of very important papers from a secret pocket."

"Well, how did you expect me to know that?"

That was sufficiently naive to be entirely truthful in its implication.

"Look, Bullman," Slade said patiently. "You've done several strong-arm jobs for Sharpoll in the past."



"You can't prove anything. I've never been arrested over here."

"That's as may be. But you're looking at it only from where you sit. Take a glance from where I'm sitting. The angle is very different. You could have been sent to shoot Drumburgh and get the key of his car. You could have done that and disappeared afterwards. Someone to whom you gave the key—someone who didn't want you to know about the papers being lifted from Drumburgh's car—could have removed them without your knowing. Doesn't look difficult to believe from where I'm sitting, does it?"

Bullman rose from his chair, felt for a fresh cigarette and lit it.

"Ah, you're just trying to scare me," he growled.

"Then I ought to be doing a better job than I am," Slade told him bluntly, and got a sharp glance.

"What's that mean?"

"You're not scared by anything I've said, Bullman. I know that. But what I've said has made you damned uneasy, because now you don't know how far you can trust Sharpoll. You had thought you'd got him doped out right. He was tricky, but he was marching in step with you — you thought. But now you're not so sure. If you didn't do the shooting, then someone else did. That someone could be Sharpoll, or somebody gunning on his behalf, somebody you don't know about. That's another damned uneasy thought, isn't it, Bullman? But look where it places you. You had to send Smailey away. Smailey can take the stand and swear to you being in the street with a firearm. You could be held in reserve by Sharpoll, ready to be thrown to the police if things got too hot. Now, I don't call that a nice situation to be in, even for a lad who can look after himself as capably as China Bullman."

The other dragged at his cigarette as Slade finished speaking. He made an impatient gesture.

"By God, he wouldn't try that stuff!" he muttered.

"Maybe Drumburgh thought that."

As soon as he had said the words Slade realized he had made a tactical error.

Bullman laughed shortly.

"All Drumburgh thought about Sharpoll was that he was a cheap skate trying to horn in on something he hadn't the capacity or ability to do himself. No, that won't wash. Drumburgh never worried his head about Oscar. He was too big. That's what made Oscar hate him. If Drumburgh hadn't put on the squeeze when he reorganized some of the Tanthorn companies Oscar would have been sitting pretty. Drumburgh got him out of Tanthorn control. No, Slade, you're wrong to hell there. You're wrong all the way through. You had me worried, I admit, for a minute. But I can see you don't know what you're talking about. It's just words. Just words," he repeated, giving that same short laugh.

Slade thought he had failed in his mission. He knocked out his pipe and rose.

"In that case there's nothing more to be said. I'm wasting my time."

"You are, every minute of it. And mine," Bullman assured him, with a show of relish.

"But when I'm gone, Bullman," Slade said, moving towards the door, "ask yourself if Cashern and Terrington are going to get what they expect. You should know. They've been double-crossing Drumburgh. I shouldn't think they'd have much to say if Sharpoll treated them the same way. Or, come to that, would you?"

Again an uneasy look came over the Australian's face, and he blew smoke through clenched teeth.

"Still at it, eh? Still trying to make me mad at Sharpoll? Well, I can take care of myself."

"I hope for your sake you can, Bullman. Because the man who pumped those bullets into Drumburgh and Mrs. Burgoyne is going to swing for it."

"Well, I don't fit that description, and you can't make me, not even with Smailey's tongue wagging."

"Oh, I'm not the one to make you fit the description, Bullman. But I was thinking Sharpoll might."

There was a dull rumbling in the Australian's throat.

"Lay off, blast you," he said through clenched teeth. "I didn't do any killing. No one can bring a stick of evidence to show I did."

He made it sound like a challenge, and Slade had not come to accept a challenge. He smiled affably.

"That's nice to know. I'll bear it in mind."

"Oh, go to Jericho, and damn your bluff. It won't work, I tell you. You can't make me panic with that cheap line of —"

He was interrupted by a banging on the front door.

"What the —"

He paused, looked at Slade uncertainly, and frowned.

"Don't mind me," Slade said gently. "See who it is, by all means. If it's Sadie Ginsetter I can be discreet. Don't worry about me."

Bullman's mouth opened and clamped shut again.

"So you've been to work on Sadie. I might have known you'd get around to her."

"Wrong, my dear man. She got around to me. She doesn't think Smailey's office is healthy any more."

"She's damned right. I'll —"

Again the loud summons came from the person on the landing. Muttering an oath, Bullman crossed to the door and pulled it open.

"What the devil is it?" he asked harshly.

Slade could not see the caller. The Australian blocked the doorway. He heard someone inquire, "Are you Irving Bullman?"

Bullman said, "I am. What do —"

That was as far as he got. The next instant he went spinning back across the room, with the newcomer leaping at him and raining blows at his head and body. For a second or two bewilderment robbed Bullman of the ability to defend himself. He was taken completely by surprise. But he recovered quickly, let out a great roar of rage, and jumped back to close with his assailant.

"Why, you blasted —"

The words were wiped away by a stinging blow across the Australian's mouth. That made Bullman really mad. Slade watched him go in to do execution. Swinging his arms, he pounded dexterously at his assailant, who was a younger man and of slighter build. In a matter of seconds Bullman had taken the upper hand. He broke through his adversary's guard, smashed a blow to his ribs, that left the younger man winded and with wavering hands, and then a short half-arm jab to the jaw sent the other to his knees, where Bullman flattened him with a straight left.

The visitor was lying spread-eagled across the dirty, worn carpet when Slade approached, and Bullman was licking a trickle of blood from the side of his mouth.

"Must be a madman," he grunted, dabbing at his hurt mouth.

Slade bent over the prone figure and felt in the inside pocket of his jacket. He drew out a wallet and some letters. The letters were addressed to Peter Burgoyne.

The Yard man looked down thoughtfully at the immobile features.

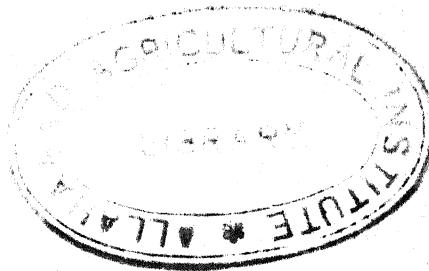
"No, he's not a madman," he said slowly. "But he's mad

enough to do something violent to the man he thinks shot his mother."

Bullman stared with bulging eyes.

"His mother?"

"Mrs. Burgoyne," Slade elucidated.



## CHAPTER XI

### AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN

PETER BURGOYNE opened his eyes slowly and fingered his jaw with tender consideration. He shook his head, and winced. His eyes widened, and he glared across the room at Bullman leaning against the mantelpiece and meditatively smoking a cigarette.

"I'll get you yet," he muttered.

Bullman lifted a burly shoulder and let it drop. He wasn't worried by the threat.

Slade, sitting across the room from the young man, put down his pipe and said, "You're feeling damned sore, aren't you, Burgoyne?"

The young man turned his head.

"Who're you?" he demanded — "another thug?"

At that Bullman laughed.

"That's a good one," he said. "That's real funny."

Slade said, "Bullman thinks I am."

"Now wait a minute," the Australian growled. "I'm not —"

Slade motioned with his hand. "All right, Bullman. I think I know just what you're calling me to yourself. But at the moment I'm more interested in Burgoyne and why he came here and what he wanted and what made up his mind for him. I'm interested in quite a lot about Burgoyne, including what he's done with a picture of his mother."

At that the young man came to his feet again, but another wave of pain caused him to screw up his face. He sat down again, and sucked air through parted lips.

"Who the heck are you?" he asked Slade, and he sounded still angry.

Bullman grinned. "Go on, Slade. Your turn," he invited.

"My name's Slade. I'm from Scotland Yard, Burgoyne. Not long ago I was trying to have a word with you — oh, some ways from here. But Murchison said you weren't around, and I've been waiting for you to turn up."

Slade remained looking at the young man in the chair, but he was well aware that when he mentioned Murchison's name Bullman threw him a sharp glance of interest.

Burgoyne shut his mouth, and his lips drew thin.

"I haven't got any time for the police," he said flatly.

Slade didn't altogether like the way his chin jutted when he said that. It gave him the impression that he might expect trouble in trying to get Burgoyne into a reasonable frame of mind.

"You and me both," Bullman grinned.

The younger man threw him a sour glance.

Slade said, "That's a pity. The police are trying — and trying hard — to find out who murdered your mother."

The youngster shook his head. "They're not. They're trying to find out who murdered Drumburgh because he was a big cheese. My mother doesn't count with the police. She was —"

His voice trembled and broke.

Slade pursed his mouth and watched a cloud of tobacco smoke spiral upward towards the ceiling. Bullman, he saw, was frowning intently, and looking very uncomfortable.

"I think you're prejudiced," he said.

"Prejudiced!" the young man sneered. "That's a nice word to cover a damned lot of meaning. I've read the papers. I know what people are thinking. I saw that solicitor who looked after my mother's things. He talked about as fast as a ton of granite. He said my mother left a will, and there would be some things

I'd have to know. He suggested that I'd like to wait a while. Oh, it was all nice and friendly and very considerate, but I saw through the damned mockery. I've been a kid long enough. My name's Burgoyne, only my father disappeared into the blue a long time ago after divorcing my mother, and ever since Drumburgh's been paying—and she . . . . What sort of a life did she have? Why couldn't she have told me? Why?"

Bullman rubbed his jaw and looked at Slade.

The Yard man said, "Burgoyne, you're not going to help anyone—least of all yourself—by being bitter. The man who murdered your mother, as I told Bullman shortly before you charged in, is listed for hanging. But before we can get very far we want some help from you. What's the mystery of the picture? Why did you come here?"

Again Slade was aware of a sharp glance directed at him by the Australian.

Burgoyne sat very still for some moments, his mouth twitching.

"I've been chasing round in circles, getting nowhere," he confessed. "I'm tired of it. But I know Bullman's concerned in my mother's death."

"Why, you young—"

Bullman pushed himself away from the mantelpiece and knotted his fists.

"Relax," Slade advised him. "Let your ears do some work. Very well, Burgoyne, you came here because you think Bullman's got something to do with your mother's murder. That means Drumburgh's too. Right?"

Peter Burgoyne scowled.

"This may seem all very strange to you, Mr. Slade, and I may appear to be acting like a damned idiot. But someone's been writing me letters hinting that my mother and Drumburgh were—well, lovers. Afterwards there came a letter

suggesting that my name shouldn't be Burgoyne, and . . . . "

His voice broke. It took him some moments to gain control again.

"That made me damned mad," he resumed. "Did you meet Knowles?"

"Yes," Slade said. "I met him."

"Well, he's been rather decent to me. Took the trouble to talk about something other than work. He paints a bit. I told him, and he said I ought to go to the police. But—well, I didn't. Then I got a wire that a parcel was being sent to me, and I was to pick it up off the train when it got into Sa—"

"I shouldn't mention place-names, if I were you," Slade advised quickly.

The youngster nodded and looked at Bullman, who was grinning wryly.

"No, I suppose not. Well, I got the parcel. It was the picture you mentioned, but there was a note inside—"

"I know about the note, Burgoyne. A somewhat unsavory gentleman by the name of Smailey sent it, hoping to benefit himself to the extent of finding out something. I gather he did. You tore into his office just the way you came here."

The young man looked rather sheepish.

"Begins to look as though I've rushed around making a complete ass of myself," he remarked.

"So he gave Smailey the same rush treatment; did he?" Bullman grinned appreciatively. "I bet that shook him up a bit. Smailey's all right till someone calls his bluff and starts swinging. Then my guess is he folds up, nice and tight and very quiet."

But Slade didn't want the young man now glowering at the Australian side-tracked from his narrative. He said, "What did Smailey tell you over that meal you had with him that led you here, Burgoyne?"

"By jeeps, so Smailey's been passing the buck two ways, then!"

Bullman walked across the room, and he looked mad enough to begin fighting on his own.

Peter Burgoyne's mouth loosened at the corners.

"He told me," he said, "that Drumburgh and my mother were great friends of many years ago. He said Drumburgh was shot because a group of high-class crooks wanted the secret of the atomic dynamo on which we had been working. He told me, too, that Betty had been murdered because she knew something that made the crooks scared. They had had to get her silenced to protect themselves. They had pretended to offer her a job, and had lured her away from home. I liked Betty. She was a nice girl, and did everything she could for my mother, and when . . . ."

His fists knotted again.

The Australian made a guttural sound and sat down in a chair near the door.

"If Smailey said I had anything to do with the Marsh girl's murder he's lying," he said thickly.

"Is that what Smailey said?" Slade inquired.

Peter Burgoyne shook his head slowly.

"No. Smailey said I'd find out more if I went to Betty Marsh's mother. He gave me an address. Somewhere in Clapham — yes, it was Nightingale Rise. I went there and saw Mrs. Marsh. She was upset, you can imagine, and at first it didn't seem she could help me. But then she remembered something her daughter had said about meeting a nice Australian one evening in a little pub somewhere at the back of Moonby Street. It took her some time to remember the name. But she found it in a little indexed book her daughter had kept. Irving Bullman."

"Damn' clever of Smailey," Bullman growled. "Letting

you find me without directly pointing to me. But I didn't know he knew about the girl—I mean, me knowing her—”

He checked himself.

“A nice Australian,” Slade murmured.

Bullman seemed suddenly sensitive. He jumped round.

“Look,” he shot at Burgoyne. “You got my name. All right, so I'd known the girl your mother employed as maid. She's been murdered. But why the hell should you come here and start a high-flinging act?”

The young man's mouth tightened.

“I made some inquiries in the pub. Mrs. Marsh gave me the name. The Bird o' Dawn. One of the barmaids remembered you, Bullman. She didn't know your name, but she'd seen you drinking in there with Betty Marsh—”

“How d'you know it was me?” Bullman asked.

“This girl in the pub said you'd come from a house lower down Moonby Street. Betty had told her. And you'd told Betty you worked for an American named—I can't remember the name, but it was something like Kindergarten, I think.”

“Try Kindermart,” Slade suggested.

“That's it—Kindermart. I remember now, because it is the same name as an American who's done quite a bit of writing in the States on atomic energy.”

“It's the same man,” Slade said.

Peter Burgoyne received this piece of information in silence. He looked at Bullman, and when at last he spoke he said slowly, “I didn't realize that at the time. If I had I think I would have shot you.”

The Australian looked uncomfortable.

“Suppose I did work for this guy Kindermart. What of it? That don't make me the killer of your mother and Drumburgh, and of Betty Marsh. Suppose I admitted I knew Betty—I'm not admitting it, but just suppose I did—and I said I

liked her. That wouldn't make it any easier for you to prove I killed her, would it?"

Peter Burgoyne got to his feet. The Australian braced himself, clearly expected another furious onslaught. But the young man contented himself with feeling in his pocket for a packet of cigarettes.

"Could you give me a light?" he asked Slade.

The Yard man handed over his box of matches. Burgoyne lit a cigarette and handed back the matches to Slade.

"Thanks," he said. "There's an alley-way at the back of Moonby Street. I marked the house of the American, and at night climbed over the wall. There was a tiny back garden, practically all paved with concrete, with a couple of small sheds. I had some notion of waiting and surprising this Bullman."

He paused, drew on his cigarette.

"Go on," said Bullman thinly.

"I'm going on, don't worry," the young man retorted. "There was a light in a back room, but the curtain was drawn. I saw figures moving against it, but I couldn't tell who they were. Then the back door opened, and someone came down a short flight of steps. I opened one of the sheds and hid inside, drawing the door shut after me. I thought I had been seen, because the person came straight to the shed and opened the door. But instead of telling me to come out, he dropped something just inside, shut the door again, and went away."

"Did you see the man clearly?" asked Slade.

"No, but he was muttering to himself, something about being damned sorry he'd ever got mixed up in it, and his voice had an Australian accent. That's why I asked Bullman who he was when I called, and when I heard his voice I knew he was the man who dropped the tommy-gun inside the shed."

"Hey, stop him, Burgoyne!" Slade shouted.

ATOMIC MURDER

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But the warning came too late.

The Australian had leaped out of the room, cleared the room beyond, and slammed the door after him before Burgoyne had started in pursuit or Slade had cleared the depths of his arm-chair.

## CHAPTER XII

### A FRESH PURSUIT

BULLMAN, WITH A head start, got away. When Slade and Peter Burgoyne reached the pavement of Bolingbroke Square he had vanished into the streams of hurrying workers. He had not doubled back in his tracks and concealed himself somewhere on the premises of the Smentyre Company, for Slade checked with the little custodian of the main entrance that Bullman had left.

"An' he seemed in a mighty hurry, too," the small man explained. "Came tearing down the steps as though the place was on fire. Can't say which way he went. But proper in a hurry he was, which seems funny, 'cos you told me you were going up to see him, and then, a little while later, someone else came and asked which was his flat."

The little man in the cap was left with the mystery that still puzzled him. Slade bundled Burgoyne into a taxi and took him to Scotland Yard. There the young man made and signed a statement, and afterwards left for his room at the Brogworth Hotel in company with Windrop. In the statement he admitted to having taken the tommy-gun back to his hotel room.

A description of China Bullman went out over the Flying Squad's radio, and every patrol car of the Squad was looking for the wanted Australian within an hour of his darting from that top room at 33 Bolingbroke Square. A plain-clothes man was sent to keep an eye on Smailey, just in case the Australian took it into his head to make for the man whom he considered had double-crossed him.

Slade rang up Professor Kindermart's house, to learn that the American was out and was not expected back until a late hour. He was on the point of ringing up Cashern when Clinton phoned. The sergeant was calling from Salchester.

He had found no further trace of Burgoyne. Slade told him of the latest development.

"So you've got him down there," Clinton said. "Good. That makes it so much easier here. By the way, I've got one piece of information. The night Drumburgh was shot seems to have been included in quite a lot of people's leave period. Murchison was on holiday. Burgoyne had that week away. According to Knowles, who's been very helpful, he went to the Lake District. He knows because he went with him. They were going to do some sketching, but the weather came down in buckets, and they called it off, so Knowles has no angle on where he was for the actual night of the shooting."

Clinton had worked through the complete list of Drumburgh employees at the factory, but had found nothing of real interest.

"All right," said Slade. "Tomorrow try out something on Murchison. Ask him what he thinks of an American named Kindermart." He spelled it for the sergeant. "I've an idea he's quite an authority on atomic energy."

Clinton asked, "Isn't that the name the chauffeur gave us? Remember?"

"Yes, and I've got an angle on him. I've even had a call from your friend Sadie Ginsetter."

"Sadie Ginsetter? Never met the wench."

"She sits in Smailey's office."

Something exploded against Slade's ear. He held the phone away, shook it, and then listened.

Clinton was saying, "And it seems I'm missing all the fun." A few minutes later he hung up.

The phone rang again. It was Windrop. He was calling from the Brogworth Hotel. Burgoyne had given him the tommy-gun. It was a Lanchester, and it had a maker's number and reference stamped on it.

"All right," Slade said, "let's have it in and check up with the military. Ought to be a chance of finding out where it left the record. What do you feel about Burgoyne, Windrop? Can we leave him tonight?"

"He's still nervy. I'm not phoning from his room, but from a call-box down in the hall. I think someone ought to be with him. Especially with Bullman on the loose."

"Very well, Windrop. Stick with him, and I'll have a man relieve you in about half an hour. That O.K.?"

"Yes, thanks."

Slade hung up once more.

He rang Cashern's flat, and got no reply. He rang Craven Court, and heard Sylvia's voice at the other end of the wire.

"This is Superintendent Slade," he said. "I was ringing up to ask if your mother's in."

"She's out with Sir Morton somewhere."

"And have you any idea where somewhere is?"

"If it's important, Mr. Slade — yes."

"It's most important."

"Very well, they went with Arthur to a show and on to the Indigo Club. I was supposed to be the fourth member of the party, but I wasn't very keen on the other three."

Slade got on to the Indigo Club. Sir Morton Cashern was there, he was told.

"Tell him Superintendent Slade is holding the line. I want to speak to him, and it is very important."

There was a short interval while he waited, then Cashern's voice came crackling in his ear.

"Whatever is it, Mr. Slade?"

Slade caught the note of fear in the other's voice.

"I take it China Bullman is known to you, Sir Morton?"

"China Bullman. Well, now, that's a peculiar name. Let me see — "

"Bullman is Oscar Sharpoll's bodyguard, his strong-arm man, — anything you like to call him."

"Ah, yes, perhaps I've heard the name — "

"Well, he's wanted, and it won't be long before he's picked up. We know about the house in Moonby Street and Kindermart, and the time — "

"Just a moment, Mr. Slade. Am I to understand that I am in some way believed to be — "

"Sir Morton" — Slade sounded like a man hanging on to the coat tails of his patience and expecting them to be torn out of his grasp any moment — "you can understand that I want to see you right away. I don't advise your seeing me at the Indigo Club, in your own interest. Perhaps you would not wish to come here — I'm calling you from Scotland Yard. I suggest that you say nothing of my call or the reason for your leaving Lady Drumburgh and Mr. Terrington."

Cashern caught his breath audibly over the phone. When he spoke his voice came meekly. The bombast was wrung out of it.

"In twenty minutes, Mr. Slade. Very well."

A Flying Squad car rushed Slade to Cashern's flat. He arrived a few moments after the other had alighted from a taxi. Without a word Cashern led the way up a flight of stairs and showed Slade into a comfortable bachelor flat, rather differently appointed from Bullman's three rooms. Tubular furniture and soft-shaded lights, pleasantly tinted walls, and the bright gleam of mirrors and chrome made the place a snug

retreat away from the noise and bustle of the West End.

Cashern produced a whisky decanter and a box of cigars.

"I'll have a drink," Slade said, "but if you don't mind I'll stick to my pipe."

"Of course, of course."

Cashern was most conciliatory, and obviously doing his best to please the Yard man and set him at his ease. He lit a cigar, poured drinks, and handed a glass to Slade. He was wise enough not to spoil the effect by suggesting a toast.

"Now what's on your mind, Mr. Slade?" he inquired. "I want to be helpful, and I —"

"Just a moment, Sir Morton," said Slade, "perhaps there is something I should tell you first. You see, I've no wish for you to say anything while you're under a misapprehension. That would not be strictly fair — and I want to be strictly fair."

Cashern frowned. He did not like this nice sense of things fitting displayed by the Yard man. It left him with an uneasy feeling. He wondered what the devil Slade had uncovered, and feared the worst.

"Nice of you, but I really don't follow."

"Let me be frank, then."

"By all means. But you've got me worried, I must confess."

Slade saw that the other had difficulty in concealing his mounting anxiety.

"Sir Morton," he said bluntly, "I know there's been a — let's say conspiracy — against Lord Drumburgh. A number of people — I could name three — conspired to gain the confidence of a certain American professor known to Drumburgh, and through him and what he represented to lay a plot to hold up certain Drumburgh activities. The American's name is Kindermart. He is well known as a research worker in atomic science, Sir Morton. Mr. Oscar Sharpoll leased a house in

Moonby Street and installed the professor there. Further, the China Bullman I mentioned on the phone concealed a tommy-gun in a garden shed at the rear of that house. These are important details, Sir Morton, and they are — shall I say significant?"

Cashern dropped into a chair, his drink untouched. He looked utterly deflated, and in the short while Slade had been talking his face had grown older-looking. Slade, watching him closely, noticed shadow lines under his eyes and at the sides of his mouth. His monocle was forgotten. He was a man driven back on his defenses, knowing those defenses were not in proper repair.

"What do you want me to say, Mr. Slade?" he asked.

Slade shrugged. "I can't tell you that, Sir Morton," he said. "But I feel I should point out to you that you will soon be in a very unenviable position."

"Soon. That's damned kind of you, Mr. Slade."

"It might conceivably be in your best interests to make a statement. Of course, I haven't come round here to inveigle you into saying anything to which your solicitor would object. But I feel — remember I didn't mention any names — that this strange alliance of interests will soon be breaking. It would suit my book very well, Sir Morton, and I'll be candid in this, if I knew I was getting a straight story from one of those unmentioned names."

Apparently Cashern had decided while Slade was speaking to discard any vestige of subterfuge.

"Why didn't you go to Terrington?"

"Purely personal reasons."

"Or Sharpoll?"

"Let's say the same reasons."

"That leaves me, and you think I'm the weakest vessel, obviously."

Slade was surprised at this show of shrewdness, but he said nothing, waiting for the other to continue, and, as he had surmised, Sir Morton Cashern was in no mood to be reticent.

"I'll make a statement for you tomorrow," he promised. "I thank you for your advice, Mr. Slade, and I shall avail myself of it. I shall see my solicitor first thing in the morning. I understand perfectly just where I shall be placed in a cut-throat struggle between Terrington and Sharpoll — right against the wall with a knife at my throat. Yes, I've got to think of myself. I shall have plenty to say, I promise, but I'm not happy. There will be publicity, I suppose?"

He looked at Slade.

"I don't see how you can avoid it, Sir Morton, unless Sharpoll throws in his hand and doesn't go ahead with trying to beat the Drumburgh interests. But that is a personal opinion only, and I am neither a business man nor a financier."

Cashern smiled ruefully.

"After tonight I shall join your company, Mr. Slade," he said, and, noticing his glass, picked up his drink and drained it. "Another?" he queried.

"No, thanks," said Slade, rising. "I wanted to make the position clear, and I think I've done so."

"You have indeed, and I'm grateful, Mr. Slade. Very grateful."

Again Cashern showed that he had a sense of the fitness of things. He did not hold out his hand as the Yard man took his leave. But Slade, turning over the brief interview in his mind as he made his way to the Flying Squad car, was not sure whether Sir Morton Cashern had been entirely honest in his purported resolve, or whether he had been putting up a bluff. However, by noon the next day he would know, and he suspected that Cashern had little to use as a bluff.

The radio operator in the car said, "There's been a call, sir.

**ATOMIC MURDER** 

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A Mr. Arthur Terrington has arrived at the Yard and wants to see you. He is waiting till you get back."

Slade dropped into his seat.

"All right, let's go," he said.

Terrington obviously had smelt a rat.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FEAR LOOSENS A TONGUE

TERRINGTON SAT alone in the waiting-room, smoking a cigarette, when Slade came upon him. He looked up as the Yard man entered, and one glance told Slade that he was scared.

"You want to see me?"

Terrington was on his feet in a single movement.

"I know you phoned Cashern—"

"Oh?"

"Don't let's beat about the bush, Superintendent. Willie at the Indigo Club is a good friend of mine for one reason only — I tip well. When I asked who phoned Cashern he told me. I dropped Lady Drumburgh at Craven Court and came on here. I don't know what Cashern's said, but I know there's not much metal in his guts, and I'm not being traded in so that he can save his neck."

He dropped the glowing butt of his cigarette on the waiting-room floor and ground it out with a heel.

"That's why I want to talk," he added.

"Better come along to my room," Slade suggested.

Terrington turned and followed the Yard man. Windrop was waiting in Slade's room. There was a tommy-gun on the desk, and the Chief Inspector had made out a brief report. Slade nodded to him.

"Better wait a few minutes, Windrop," he suggested. "You may hear something interesting."

Terrington objected. "I wanted a talk without witnesses,"

he said pointedly, and scowled when Windrop grinned.

Slade sat down and pointed to a chair.

"I can't promise favors, Mr. Terrington," he said bluntly. "I've just told as much to Sir Morton Cashern. I added that I'd be glad to have one of you tell a straightforward story that will let me weigh the truth for myself —"

"You won't get it from Cashern," Terrington grunted.

"Maybe not. Shall I get it from you?"

Windrop's grin widened as he glanced from Slade to the man who had been in a hurry to talk only a short while before, and now seemed to be having second thoughts.

"You don't have to talk," Slade added. "Again, as I told Cashern, I'm not asking you to say anything you don't want to get advice on."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean if you want to see your solicitor first, by all means do so. But you came here voluntarily, Mr. Terrington. What you tell me will be recorded. I can't waste time listening to a story you may have second thoughts about later and wish to deny."

Terrington flushed.

"You're being more than a bit blunt," he suggested.

"I've had a long day, Mr. Terrington, and so has Chief Inspector Windrop. We're both tired. That's all."

"Very well, then," Terrington said, as though coming to a decision with himself. "I'll tell you something that I won't take back."

"Good."

"There was a scheme to hold up Drumburgh Trust production of an atomic dynamo."

"Was?"

"Well, frankly, after the past two days I'm not sure that 'is' would be true."

"I see. You think Sharpoll may be wriggling out?"

Terrington looked surprised. "So you know about him — "

"And Cashern and China Bullman . . . and I can guess about you, Mr. Terrington. Oh, yes, I know about Kindermart, too. But in telling you this I'm only going round in a circle. I'm not getting anywhere fresh."

"Cashern told you, I suppose."

"You're free to suppose anything you wish. Let's get one thing straight right now. I'm not going to prompt you, Mr. Terrington, except on one point."

"And what's that?"

"When I called at Craven Court the other day you had a red sports car parked in the main drive. I take it the car was yours?"

"Yes, I have a red sports model, and it was in the drive the day you called."

"Before I left, the car had gone. It had not been put in the garage, I know, because it disappeared while I was talking to Sayles. Where did you go, Mr. Terrington?"

The other hesitated for a moment. "You have to know?"

"I'm afraid so. It's important."

Still Terrington hesitated to explain. He said uneasily, "Do you mind telling me just why it is so important, Mr. Slade?"

Slade quashed a rising impatience.

"I will, Mr. Terrington. It's important because you were away from Craven Court at a time when Betty Marsh was met by someone at fourteen Bolingbroke Square and murdered."

Terrington massed his reserves to meet the sudden change in the room's atmosphere. He looked anxious, but to Slade's watchful eye capable of maintaining control over his disturbed thoughts.

"I see. Yes, it looks a bit awkward. I — I didn't want to tell you this — "

Again he hesitated, patently reluctant to tell Slade what the detective wished to know.

"I'm amazed at the number of things people in this case don't want to tell me," Slade said, and there was a very discernible edge of sarcasm to his words.

Windrop grinned, and folded his arms. For a couple of minutes he was very interested in the shape of his fingernails.

"I went down into the country somewhere," Terrington said, with the air of a man screwing himself up to face great danger. "I had an important meeting to attend, which couldn't be put off."

"Drumburgh business?"

"Well, not directly."

"Mind telling me who the meeting was with? It's possible I shall find it necessary to check this . . . alibi."

That final word had a strange and foreign ring to the agitated secretary. It worried him. Enough, anyway, to induce him to answer the question, which was one for which he obviously had little liking.

"Sharpoll."

He got a sharp, stabbing glance from Slade.

"And the rendezvous was a house near Redhill called Thornlea, wasn't it, Mr. Terrington?"

At that swift verbal riposte Terrington was almost unarmed. He started, and looked at the detective with great consternation.

"Good God!" he muttered. "So you know —"

Slade was wearying rapidly. "Yes," he helped him along, "I know about the house being in Bullman's name, of Cashern and Sharpoll going there to convince Kindermart of the wisdom of joining up with them instead of Drumburgh. I even know a lot about a certain secretary who went down there and took notes and forgot to give all the copies to Cashern.

Oh, I know a lot of things, Mr. Terrington. You'd be amazed at what I know. But I still don't happen to know who killed Drumburgh and stole the papers from his car, and I haven't found out who strangled Betty Marsh."

Terrington had little resistance left now.

"Hell, what a tangle!" he mumbled.

Slade left that alone as not worth taking up.

Terrington went on, "I phoned Sharpoll as soon as I could. I was worried about the picture. Don't misunderstand me. I know nothing about the picture . . . . intrinsically. But I know Cashern took it. I couldn't very well let him down when you spoke about it to Sylvia. He might have had a perfectly good explanation which he could give you himself. You see?"

"I see you're making out a case for deceiving me."

"I object to that, Mr. Slade—"

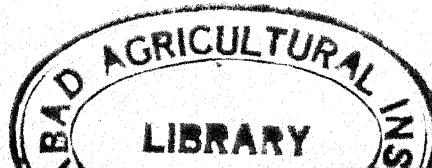
"Fine. Object away. I really don't mind. But I still say you deceived me."

"Well, if you care to put it that way perhaps it was a mild deception. Yes, perhaps it was. But when I was told by Cashern that you had found out — and he didn't know how — that he had hired Frederick Smailey on Lady Drumburgh's behalf — then I didn't like the look of what I saw developing. I frankly had no wish to be caught up in a widening web of complications."

That last mouthful of syllables caused Windrop to forget his fingernails and stare at Terrington as though he had made a sudden discovery.

"And so you phoned Sharpoll — without telling Cashern — and impressed upon him the importance of seeing you without delay somewhere where you would not be disturbed and where you could talk at length in private. Or am I cutting the long story too short, Mr. Terrington?" Slade asked.

"No, that's about it. Sharpoll is a business man. He's



one of those men who start by hitching their wagon to a star—”

“I’m no astronomer,” Slade said thinly. “In this sort of case the only stars I see are those reflected in the gutter. You knew you had jiggered yourself with the Drumburgh organization if the story of your secret tie-up with Sharpoll ever leaked out, and you were making sure of your hooks, weren’t you?”

Terrington remained silent. He looked pretty dejected.

“I started off by saying I wasn’t going to prompt you, Mr. Terrington. You’ve altered that. You wanted to tell me what you were up to so that I wouldn’t get strange ideas about you and make things more awkward than they are at the moment. Further, you wanted to sound me out about Cashern. You think he could shop you, to be quite blunt. But once you got inside this room you found the temperature much lower than you had anticipated. Your feet quickly got cold. Mr. Terrington, I’m afraid I must tell you”—Slade stood up—“you’re just wasting my time. And it’s the wrong end of the day for me to indulge in time-wasting. I can’t make it up. Good night.”

Terrington rose, threw a glance at Windrop, and then faced Slade.

“Look here, Mr. Slade,” he said, “you’re rather pushing me along. All right, don’t tell me I’m wasting time. You’re right in the main. Dead right. Cashern worked through me and I worked through him. We had an understanding with Sharpoll. Say it was double-crossing. I can be blunt. Then Drumburgh was double-crossed. But Cashern and I were thrown together as—well, allies in arms, if you like—for another reason. He is rather attached to Lady Drumburgh. I myself am very fond of Sylvia, for all her adolescent waywardness. I know how she likes mocking me through Murchison, but I don’t set any store by that. Sylvia’s young—”

Slade didn’t want any more of that. He could guess it. And

if he couldn't it didn't matter a hoot.

He said, "I'm right in the main, you say. You suggest I've gone off the rails somewhere. Let's have it, Mr. Terrington — where? At last you've really interested me."

He sat down. Terrington remained standing.

"You're running right off the rails when you start looking for a murder motive in this Sharpoll tie-up. I know what's in your mind. You couldn't help but arrive at it. Appearances have forced you to consider this conspiracy on the part of the three of us — Sharpoll, Cashern, and myself — which was entirely a business plot, as having some sinister motive for murdering Drumburgh."

Slade laughed gently.

"You've a pretty turn of phrase, Mr. Terrington. I must compliment you on it. 'Appearances have forced me to consider . . . .' You're too damned right. A house leased a few doors from the house where murder was committed. Sharpoll's pet Aussie tough dumping this tommy-gun in a garden shed at the back of that house" — Slade pointed to the weapon Windrop had brought from South Kensington — "that same tough warning Smailey to clear out of Moonby Street a few minutes before Drumburgh and Mrs. Burgoyne were mowed down, all on the night the maid is away, and she is murdered later, within a stone's throw of the Smentyre Company's offices, and that company in the Sharpoll group, and the Aussie I mentioned living above the offices . . . . I'll say appearances have forced me. They've damned near forced me to make an arrest."

As he finished Slade sounded angry. Windrop gave him a swift side-glance, just to determine how far round the official wind had changed. He then looked at Terrington, interested to know whether he would be a fool or act wisely.

Terrington surprised him by doing what wisdom counseled.

He talked, and there was evident a new earnestness in his manner. He was afraid, desperately, and fear was loosening his tongue.

He leaned across the detective's desk, staring down at the tommy-gun.

"That could be the weapon that shot Drumburgh and Mrs. Burgoyne. I don't know. All I know is that Sharpoll introduced Cashern to a man who said he could get the Drumburgh secret details — which is something I couldn't have got easily — anyway, I wasn't going to say I could. It was too risky, and there was always a chance that Drumburgh, in the early stages, might scotch the whole scheme. He got loads of information from a number of sources. I was, if you want me to be completely unambiguous, playing for both sides in my own way. That seemed the clever thing to do. I stood to gain whatever happened — except murder."

He paused. Slade did not interrupt. He knew that after many false starts Terrington had begun unreeling a story that was news.

"This man — I did not meet him — I had to leave most of the meetings to Cashern, as you can understand — was a Frenchman, I believe. He had been a member of the Maquis and had won a reputation as an intrepid underground leader during the German occupation. He claimed he had his own way of finding things out. He met Sharpoll and Cashern several times at intervals, and always his story was convincing. He knew enough to convince Sharpoll, who is no fool, that he had inside Drumburgh information. Cashern brought along several pieces of such information to me, and I was almost scared by what this Frenchman knew. I tried to find out in my own way who he was. Oh, I didn't pass the job to Smailey. Nothing like that. I may be a fool, but I'm in another class from Cashern." There was a scornful ring to his words, but he

succeeded in remaining a figure of life and not a poor imitation of a stage villain. He was convincing in his part, and when he added, "I did my own snooping," Slade nodded with appreciation. "I went through the Drumburgh lists of employees, but I couldn't find that we had a single Frenchman in any of the companies, and that, as a simple piece of statistics, is somewhat astounding. Of course, I'm not referring to machine-minders. I couldn't check the lists of workshop operatives without causing a few eyebrows to lift. I checked the executive and administrative staffs. This man knew enough to be no ordinary employee. He was somewhere close to things, and I came to the conclusion that he must be — of necessity — at the old shadow factory near Salchester. Something that helped the suggestion was the fact that he gave no London address to Sharpoll. Of course, that could have been wariness. But then again the times he met them were infrequent, and with long intervals between. I had got to the stage of checking the holiday periods of the administrative staff at the factory when I found out — quite by chance — that Murchison had been a hit in amateur theatricals."

He stopped, pushed himself away from Slade's desk, and felt for his cigarettes. Lighting one, he held the burning match in his fingers for some moments before expunging it with a quick puff of smoke. The fingers, both the Yard men noticed, were steady.

"I'd like to know how you found out," Slade said.

"Sylvia told me," he said, and Slade knew that Terrington had paused purposely, waiting for the question. He wished to appear reluctant to point suspicion at Murchison. "She mentioned it quite as an aside one day. Apropos of a reference to a new play that had come on in the West End, I think, but I can't be sure of the details. Anyway, I was interested — very. I was even more interested when I went ahead with my check-

ing of the factory holidays and leave periods and found that Murchison had been absent, quite officially, at each time this unknown Frenchman had met Sharpoll and passed on convincing details of the atomic dynamo."

There was no doubt that the situation in Slade's office had changed considerably in the past ten minutes. Terrington was no longer the hesitant informer, unsure of himself and his audience. It might have been largely a false front, but he looked pleased with himself for having unloaded what he knew.

"How long before Lord Drumburgh's death did she make this discovery?"

"Two days."

"And you told his lordship?"

"No."

"Why?"

"For one thing he was very busy during those days. He seemed preoccupied."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it's something I haven't mentioned to anyone else, but I think his lordship had a premonition of — well, approaching disaster. For him personally, I mean. I know he saw his solicitors about that time, and I think when the trustees of his estate make a statement you'll find he made a will only a very short time before his . . . . murder."

Terrington flinched at the word, but did not change it. He was going forward now, Slade could see.

"Did he mention this premonition to you?"

"Indirectly, yes. Once or twice. And something he said made me uneasy. I got the impression that he had been threatened. Mind you, this is only an impression. I did not explain this much to Windrop earlier nor to yourself the other day, but then I was asked for known facts. Now, in the space of a few hours, this whole case has assumed a vastly different aspect. I

must tell you what I think as well as what I know."

"And you've been thinking — what?"

"I've been thinking Sharpoll might have secretly, without telling Cashern, decided on psychological warfare. He could have got this Bullman to make subtly threatening phone calls — "

"You sound almost convinced that there were such phone calls, don't you?"

"Well, in my own mind, I am convinced. But I've no evidence to give you. Only my knowledge of Drumburgh, gained from some years of working closely with him and learning to gauge and assess his various moods."

"Yet the explanation you suggest is very far-fetched."

"I admit that. But I've never really trusted Sharpoll, which is why I kept more or less in the background and let Cashern make the running with him."

"Then you are not suggesting Bullman shot his lordship?"

"I'm as mystified as you. I didn't know he had the tommy-gun that's on your desk till you told me. No, I don't like saying it, because it rather makes it seem I'm using a personal grudge, but I've been driven to face the possibility that Murchison could have, for his own purposes, played the role of the Maquis leader, and then finally — when Drumburgh showed him he didn't like his friendship with Sylvia — he — "

"Oh, so you're telling me something else that's new. Now you're hinting at a possible motive."

Terrington pressed out his cigarette butt.

"Sorry if you don't find it palatable, Mr. Slade, but you asked for the truth. Drumburgh once wrote Murchison in no uncertain terms that he wouldn't have Sylvia becoming too friendly with him. One last thing, and then I'll go home to bed. Cashern told me this. You must take his word, not mine. Two days after the murder a package arrived at Kindermart's, ad-

dressed care of him for Oscar Sharpoll. The package was kicking around for a few days before there was a meeting at the house. When Sharpoll untied it he found a violin case, locked, with the key tied to a piece of string wound round the handle. When he unlocked the case he found a tommy-gun, in the best Chicago tradition. There was a brief note in printed capitals lying on the gun. It read, 'Just to prove I was in earnest about you know what.' But don't take my word for it. Ask Cashern. He'll give you the dope — if his solicitor will let him!"

Ten minutes later Terrington left, and Slade, feeling very tired, put the tommy-gun in a cupboard, after carefully wrapping it in fresh tissue paper.

## CHAPTER XIV

### EXPLOSION

EVEN WHILE SLADE was listening to Terrington's story firemen were battling with a roaring blaze that threatened the entire works of the factory near Salchester. Fire spread rapidly after a mysterious explosion that occurred about a quarter-past eleven.

Slade read of the fire in the papers next morning. The news was blazoned across the front pages in large black initials. There were hints that activity at the factory concerned experiments with machinery for harnessing atomic energy. Write-ups of the various companies in the Drumburgh Trust followed, with references to the atomic experimental station at Didcot, and once more pictures of Drumburgh appeared, with italic captions reminding readers that the police were still hunting for the murderer of the man who had built the great Trust.

The Press asked many questions. It wanted to know, among other things, if the fire and explosion resulted from sabotage. And if sabotage, from which quarter was it directed?

The newspaper writers took a gloomy view of the implications in what was described as "this new outrage." Slade felt pretty glum when he had finished reading the reports. He went to the Yard, expecting fresh news from Clinton, and was not disappointed. The sergeant had been on the job, and he had news of his own — news that had not yet got into the newspapers.

He had phoned and left a Salchester number. Slade was put through to it, and heard Clinton's honest Cockney accent.

"Murchison's pretty mad, and I think he's capable of going off half-cocked," the sergeant said. "Duckbott's looking after the local angles, but Murchison's coming to London. The explosion occurred in a workshop where Knowles had been going over some of those tinted drawings of his. He had been working late. Apparently on Murchison's instructions. Anyway, he was trapped by the fire. They've found his corpse. Too badly burned . . . ."

Clinton's voice faded, and a sharp burring sound rang in Slade's ear. It was nearly a minute before the sergeant came through again clearly.

"This damned line," he was saying. "What the blazes—"

"All right, Clinton, I can hear you now. You say Knowles died in the fire?"

"Yes. That's what made Murchison mad. He seems to think he's responsible in some way or other. Anyway, I haven't got a chance to go ahead with the original inquiry."

"Listen, Clinton," Slade said. "If Murchison comes to London, you come too. If he stays, you stay. Got that?"

"Yes, I've got it. Anything else?"

"Not just now. Stick to Murchison. Don't get under his feet, but don't lose him. If he's got some crazy notion of trying a lone hand I want to know."

Clinton rang off.

For the next half-hour Slade was in close conference with the A.C., who, before the detective left, got in touch with one of the Yard's chief legal advisers. After five minutes' somewhat one-sided conversation with that luminary of the Inner Temple the A.C. turned to Slade and said, "Very well, go ahead and tackle Sharpoll. And if you want to start at this Thornlea place, don't hesitate."

Slade didn't. A Flying Squad car sped him south out of London to Redhill, and an hour after leaving the A.C.'s room

he was getting out of the car and looking at the red brick and ivy-covered walls of a Georgian house set on a small knoll, so that it surveyed the countryside around. *Thornlea* was an attractive house, and its grounds comprised a few acres of pleasantly cultivated parkland. It was well away from the Brighton road, and secluded without being completely cut off from good roads or inaccessible from the railway.

But Slade was in no frame of mind to appreciate the geographical and architectural amenities of the place. He rang the bell in the porch, and waited with some impatience while an aged manservant stirred himself to answer the summons.

The manservant seemingly was part of the household furniture. He went with the place. It took Slade five minutes to learn that *Weddle*, the aged retainer, was really in the employ of a Mr. *Feathermarch*, who was away somewhere on the Continent. Mr. *Feathermarch* had let the house furnished to a Mr. *Carlton*, described by the quavering-voiced *Weddle* as "a Colonial gentleman." From which verbal cameo Slade was able to distinguish *China Bullman*.

"Is Mr. *Carlton* at home?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"He's seldom here, I take it?"

"That is so. He lives in London, but comes here only occasionally, when he has some friends to stay with him."

"How many times has he been here since he took the place?" Slade wanted to know.

*Weddle* screwed up his pale face.

"I should say not more than half a dozen. Once he stayed for a week. But usually only over the weekend."

As the man stopped, Slade turned, his attention attracted by the sound of a car coming up the gravelled drive. It was a large *Rolls*, and it drew up behind the *Flying Squad* car. Before the chauffeur could dart round to open the rear door it

was flung open by someone who was obviously in a hurry.

Slade recognized the hurrying occupant of the car as Oscar Sharpoll. His large head was sunk low between his wide shoulders, and his strangely hairless brows were gathered down in a frown of concentrated thought. He was followed by Sir Morton Cashern. And Cashern looked more disturbed than he had when Slade had left him, not many hours previously.

"You're Superintendent Slade?" Sharpoll snapped.

"Yes, and I don't like being interrupted," Slade replied coldly.

Sharpoll waved a hand, as though he was clearing smoke from before his face.

"Don't get upstage, damn it," he said. "You've done plenty of fencing, and you're after Bullman. Well, stop wasting time. I can probably tell you what you want to know. Bullman's a heavy-handed customer, but he's not the fellow you want."

"But you know the person I want," Slade said.

Sharpoll's lips drew thin.

"I might. I might at that," he said. "Let's go inside."

Weddle coughed. "Excuse me, sir—"

"Get out of the way, you old fool," Sharpoll told him. "I rent this place. Carlton is my agent, so for God's sake don't stand about as though you've been struck with a palsy."

Cashern said to Slade, "I haven't seen my solicitor."

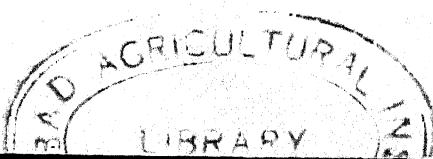
"You thought Sharpoll would be more useful, in the circumstances?" the Yard man inquired innocently.

Cashern straightened his tie.

"In view of what happened last night at the Drumburgh experimental factory—"

"Come on in, Morton," Sharpoll called. "We haven't got all the hours of daylight to waste."

Cashern bit his lip, and preceded Slade into a pleasant room overlooking the garden at the rear. Sharpoll had seated himself at a large mahogany table, and was engaged in lighting a



cigar to his satisfaction. He still wore the frown of concentration.

"Look," he said to Slade, "I'm going to make things simple."

Despite a natural annoyance he was feeling, the Yard man grinned. Sharpoll had comic values, and was utterly ignorant of the fact. He went through life barging against people, knocking them over, trampling on them, getting his own way by ruthless procedure and singleness of mind, was cruel and determined and unrelenting—and very funny.

But the last quality could be appreciated only objectively. There was nothing funny about Oscar Sharpoll to the weaker adversaries who went under before his commercial onrush.

"I don't think that'll be easy," Slade said.

But Oscar Sharpoll had a way with him. To him "easy" and "hard" were merely words. What mattered was the act they described, and once Sharpoll had set himself to a certain line of action, then how or why or hard or easy did not matter, so long as the action was completed when he wanted it completed.

"Let me do the talking," he suggested. "Cashern's a fool, or he wouldn't have got himself in a mess with the Yard."

"Damn it, Oscar, I protest—" Cashern started.

"Shut up," Sharpoll told him flatly, talking round his cigar. "You've had your chance, and muffed it. Slade"—he turned to the detective—"I found out from Windrop when I phoned the Yard where you were. I convinced him I had to see you. Here I am."

"Is this going to be just more talk?" Slade asked. "I'm getting a bit tired of the process. I'm looking for someone to do something—"

"Someone did—last night," Sharpoll snapped.

"You're not suggesting that you know something about the Drumburgh factory business, I take it?"

"I might. I might at that." It seemed to be a regular phrase with Sharpoll. He looked suddenly foxy. "You're hunting Bullman, and Bullman's lying low."

"You know where he is?"

"I don't want to answer that question — at the moment, anyway. But I'll tell you this. Bullman phoned me last night at half-past ten. He was in London then. So he could not have been in a factory near Salchester."

"If you've taken the trouble to look me up and follow me here merely to provide Bullman with an alibi — "

"Don't get me wrong, Bullman doesn't mean a row of brass pins to me except in so far as he's useful. He knows that. That's why he does what I tell him and doesn't start trying tricks on his own. I wouldn't stand for it. Bullman can be found when you want him."

"I want him now."

"Pardon me differing from you, Slade, but you don't. You want the man who murdered Drumburgh and the man who did that job last night."

"You think it's one and the same person?"

"I do."

"And you realize how incredible that sounds?"

Sharpoll sucked at his cigar and eyed Slade steadily. Not a muscle of his face moved until he said quietly, "I do. That's why I'm here. I know what Morton's told you. I can guess that lily-livered squirt Terrington has already jumped in and tried to complicate things. Only Bullman has the guts to take a chance and keep out of the way while I talk without a fool around to make things difficult."

Slade considered this. He didn't trust Sharpoll, and the lack of trust was instinctive. He had no experience of previous dealings with the man, but he knew of his unsavory reputation in the City.

"Can you make it brief?" Slade asked the financier.

"Brief enough," Sharpoll assured him.

"Let's have it, then."

"Off the record, of course."

Slade groaned mentally.

"Very well, off the record. But I must warn you of this. If I can make use of what you tell me I shall do so, and if I find I want you to make an official statement I shall come to you for one."

"That's a pretty hard bargain, considering I've come to you quite freely to help."

"We won't get far if you adopt that line," Slade assured him. "You've come to me because you're damned uneasy about how you stand. You had a plan to throw a nice big monkey wrench into Drumburgh's works. Well, he died first. Now the monkey wrench has been thrown, a bit late, but I should say the effect is quite up to expectations. Don't get the idea I'm siding with the Drumburgh crowd against you. I'm not. Personally I don't give a fig which group of companies makes the biggest profit and declares the biggest dividend. But it's my job to find an answer to a certain problem, and a lot of people are purposely making it difficult for me — "

"Come, come, Slade," Cashern protested. "Not purposely."

"Look, Slade," Sharpoll said, "you're peering at this thing from the wrong slant."

He paused, and before he could continue Slade said, "I thought you were going to be brief."

Cashern snickered quietly, and got a hard glance from the eyes frowning over the brown stem of the cigar.

"Very well," Sharpoll said, and Slade knew he had won his point. "Terrington and Cashern were in with me to get Kindermart to work with my group instead of Drumburgh's. Just a business proposition. Kindermart was put up at a house

in Moonby Street. It so happened I was able to get the house, and it was convenient."

"Then you didn't know about Mrs. Burgoyne living a few doors away?"

"Not a thing."

"Just coincidence?"

"Well, not 100 per cent. Drumburgh, through one of his holding companies, had bought quite a piece of London property, and that included a block of houses in Moonby Street. Mrs. Burgoyne's house was in the block, and so was the one that Kindermart took. Actually it was Drumburgh himself who suggested that Kindermart could be accommodated in the house I later leased — on Kindermart's behalf."

"Drumburgh didn't know, then, that you were behind Kindermart?"

"No, the lease was in the name of Carlton, like this place. Bullman, of course. However, to cut through all that, and to show that there was no sinister motive in getting Kindermart housed in Moonby Street, he was moved in, kept up negotiations with Drumburgh, and was still in process of negotiating with him at the time he was murdered."

"Drumburgh was being played along?"

"In a fashion."

"Very well. Now, let's get to this mysterious Frenchman from the Maquis."

Cashern gave a little gasp of surprise.

Sharpoll, twirling the cigar to one side of his fleshy mouth, said, "Oh, you know. Terrington. I can guess it in one, and you don't have to confirm it."

"The little so-and-so," Cashern murmured.

Slade said, "Well, now it seems there's no reason for holding up further disclosures. Who is this member of the French underground?"

This time Sharpoll took the cigar from his mouth before he replied, in a manner of great frankness. "If I knew I'd tell you, Slade. You don't have to doubt that."

"No, I don't have to," Slade said pointedly.

Sharpoll shook his head, and tried unsuccessfully to open his eyes wide. The unused muscles, however, refused to be strained.

"I'll tell you." Sharpoll was almost putting over his act of being an open-handed man who wanted to tell all. "One day I get a phone call. It is from a man who speaks with a French accent. He wants to help me."

"And of course you listen to every one who rings you up and speaks with a French accent and offers to help."

Sharpoll tried to open his eyes wide again, but gave it up as a bad job.

"I am one of the easiest men in the world for people to approach. Anyone can come to me."

"All right. This Frenchman rang you up."

"He did. What he said made so much sense I had to tell him to remember he was on the telephone. I arranged to see him. We had a meeting here. He was prepared to help us at a price. At a price we were ready to be helped. Just business."

"Of course."

Sharpoll didn't detect the ironical inflection in the Yard man's tone. Cashern did, and wriggled uncomfortably.

"Well, it was finally agreed, after several other meetings —" Sharpoll continued.

"Where were they held?"

"Mostly at Kindermart's."

"Any more of them here?"

"No."

"All right, what was agreed?"

"That certain information of a valuable nature could be procured."

"Plans?"

"I wouldn't like to use so defining a word as plans."

"I bet you wouldn't," Slade said. "Stealing the property of another company is a criminal offence. Aiding or receiving such property is also a criminal offence. You weren't bending the law this time, you were breaking it."

Sharpoll's under lip protruded.

"I wasn't doing anything. I was told there would be something for me to buy. I was in the market for it. Of course, if it turned out that innocently I had paid good cash for stolen goods — why, then I'm the injured party! I've got a reason to complain and turn to the police, haven't I?"

"Pretty words, but I don't think they would have the same meaning in a court," Slade said.

"Why not?"

"Because this Frenchman or whoever he is was scheming to get the missing papers from Drumburgh's car. He murdered him to get the key. Murdered Mrs. Burgoyne to make sure there was no witness to testify against him. With the key he took the papers. But previously he had several times sent you information of a nature sufficiently accurate to assure you that he was fairly close to what was happening at the factory near Salchester."

Sharpoll breathed out a cloud of blue smoke.

"Damn Terrington's babbling tongue," he said, and it was the first time since they had entered the room that Slade had seen the man really annoyed.

"Where are the papers?" the Yard man asked.

Sharpoll twisted in his chair. "I don't know," he said.

Slade saw that he expected to be believed.

"You mean to say that, after all the talk and effort, and

after screwing you up to name a price, this Frenchman went through with the job, murdered a couple of people, stole the papers, and then refused to collect his price?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say. I'm worried." Slade laughed shortly.

"So should I be in your shoes," he said. "Damned worried." Cashern moaned faintly.

Sharpoll pulled himself together and rolled the cigar across his mouth. His manner became very confidential, a change that Slade suspected at once.

"I'm worried," he said, "because he's a man with a mania. Only a man with a mania would have murdered that maid. What was her name? Betty Marsh."

"Go on," Slade said.

"This ex-member of the Maquis is crazy. I didn't think so at first. I do now. He said he wanted money. All right, money is something I understand. It's something I pay out if I get what I want. One can do things with money—trade. But this Frenchman hasn't had any money. He hasn't delivered any papers. He goes around killing people. It's crazy, I tell you."

"Maybe, but it's also very convenient that he hasn't received any money from you or delivered goods in exchange, because that alone seems to keep you inside the law."

Sharpoll sucked wetly at his cigar and threw a long, reflective look at Cashern.

"Crazy," he insisted. "Only a crazy man would have insisted on the picture being sent to the boy."

Again Slade felt he was entering quicksands that threatened to engulf him.

"I don't understand about the picture. I know Cashern wanted it, and was allowed to have it. But I don't know why, and I'd like to."

Sharpoll might have been a small trader gesturing to a

shop assistant. He threw out his left hand, and in the morning sunlight streaming into the room from the garden a diamond in the ring on his little finger winked fierily.

"Tell the Superintendent, Morton. He wants to know," he said, and the words were a command.

Cashern took the monocle from his eye and polished it vigorously.

"I was with Sharpoll on two or three occasions when he met this Frenchman," he explained. "I knew what he said he could do, and I knew what sort of information he offered, and how Terrington checked it and found it amazingly accurate. One day I got a phone call from him. There was no mistaking his voice on the wire, and he told me enough to be sure of the identity of the speaker. There was no question about that. But he wanted me to do a very strange thing. He wanted me to send a telegram to a Peter Burgoyne, and he gave me the address and told me what to say. It was a short wire to the effect that a parcel would be dispatched by train at such and such a time, and asked him to be on hand to collect it. The parcel was the picture. I didn't like doing it one bit. It struck me as — well, rather ridiculous. I mean to say, a picture . . . what could it mean, what significance could it have? Anyway, I had a word with Oscar — "

"That's it, drag me in. Whatever you don't do, don't forget to do that." Sharpoll's tone was iced with contempt. "Yes, Slade, I said send it. Drumburgh was dead, there had been no papers and no request for money. Sending the picture might appear strange — damned strange. But what could we lose?"

"Depends on the value of the picture and the temper of the judge," Slade suggested.

Sharpoll grimaced.

"The picture wouldn't go astray. We knew where it was going, but if it was needed to get results — use it. That was

what I thought then. I still think it was reasonable. But there haven't been any papers, no demand for money, no words about the picture."

"You're not strictly accurate in that last," Slade put in, and gave an account of the visit to Bullman's flat by young Peter Burgoyne.

Sharpoll smoked rapidly, throwing billows of blue smoke across the room.

"So that's why he jumped it," he mused. "He wouldn't tell me on the phone. Said it could wait. And thanks to you wanting to keep your pretty manicured hands clean, Morton, that louse Smailey got in and fixed things just dandy."

Cashern looked crushed. The circle of glass was back in his eye, and his hands were clasped together. He looked very unhappy, which, to Slade's mind, was just about the way he should be looking.

"Having told me so much, which unfortunately helps me very little," Slade said, "what about telling me the Frenchman's name?"

"I wish I could. But then it probably wouldn't be his real one," Sharpoll grunted.

"You don't mean to tell me he didn't give you a name?"

Slade sounded, and indeed looked, incredulous.

"I do. He wouldn't give a real name. We were to know him by his name in the Maquis. Monsieur Hirondelle. It was just a sort of code."

Slade smiled. "Hirondelle — swallow. I wonder if he was punning? But perhaps his English wasn't good enough for a joke like that."

"There was nothing wrong with his English, but he always spoke with a marked French accent."

"And at no time did he give you another name — nor did Smailey dig up one?"

Sharpoll leaned his bulk forward across his pudgy, trouser-tight knees.

"I didn't want Smailey messing around in this business. Don't get the wrong idea about that. I didn't know till you told me that Smailey took the picture to the station. If that had been suggested to me I would have said no. I've no use for Mr. 'Nosy-Parker' Smailey."

They had reached a temporary impasse. The conversation had run itself to a natural terminus, and it was up to one of them to begin afresh. However, while Slade was framing his thoughts and weighing what he was going to ask Sharpoll about Kindermart, they heard a telephone bell ringing somewhere outside the room.

They all listened to it, and to the muffled tones of the man Weddle who answered the call.

There was silence when Weddle put down the instrument and padded towards the room where they waited. He sniffed apologetically as he came into the room, and blinked as he stood in the sunlight.

"There's someone on the phone wanting Mr. Sharpoll. It's a foreign gentleman and he says his name is — well, I couldn't quite catch it, but I thought he said Bluebell. Does it mean anything, Mr. Sharpoll?"

Slade smiled back at the frowning man who suddenly seemed to forget his cigar.

"I think Hirondelle would be more accurate than Bluebell, don't you?" he asked Sharpoll.

Sharpoll swore profanely.

"Is he holding on?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"He didn't say how he came to know I was here?"

"No, sir. But he did ask me to explain that he hadn't much time to waste holding on while you made up your mind."

This piece of information produced a violent explosion from Sharpoll, who struggled to his feet, growling and grunting like some strange marine animal brought to the surface after spending its life in the ocean depths.

Slade smiled.

"If you get the offer of the papers now, you'll have to accept and break the law."

"Rats."

Which was the last Sharpoll had to say before he followed Weddle out of the room.

As the door closed Cashern got to his feet and sprang across the room to the window. He stood in the sunlight with his back to the Yard man, and said, without turning his head, "What are you going to do, Superintendent?"

"That depends on what Sharpoll does."

"Sharpoll won't do anything now. It's too late. The whole scheme's gone sour."

The words were almost prophetic. Three minutes later, while Cashern still stood in the window, Sharpoll came back. He slammed the door shut behind him.

"This is madness!" he exclaimed.

He stood for a moment clenching and unclenching his hands. The others waited for him to continue.

"Our Monsieur Hirondelle apparently has no sense of humor. He cannot appreciate when a joke has misfired. He wants the money immediately, and he will turn over the papers as originally promised. I told him there's nothing doing. Murder wasn't any part of the bargain. He says in that case he will give the papers to Professor Kindermart for nothing, and he can do what he likes with them. Do you understand? I've spent hundreds getting Kindermart round to my way of thinking, getting him to join us, and here's a lunatic who's murdered three people already about to show me up as a fake and then—"

He still had the cigar in his fingers. It had smoldered out. Now, in his sudden rush of emotion, the cigar snapped into a mess of tortured leaves.

"And then?" Slade asked softly.

"Then nothing! I've told him to wait for twenty-four hours. It was all I could do—stall for time. And, damn it, twenty-four hours isn't long enough!"

## CHAPTER XV

### CONCENTRATION OF FORCES

MURCHISON ARRIVED in London from Salchester shortly after two o'clock. He phoned Sylvia from Euston, and she met him half an hour later in a Soho restaurant, and sat drinking coffee and watching him eat. When he had finished the meal he said, "Sylvia, you and I have got to come to a decision. I'm not happy about things. I don't know where Terrington stands, but I'm prepared to go before the Drumburgh Board and tell that bunch of stuffed shirts a few home-truths."

She accepted a cigarette from him and held it in the flame of his match.

"Very laudable," she commended. "But what precisely is the decision I've got to come to with you, Jimmy?"

"I want to chuck this silly secrecy, which enables hidden interests to hit at us. You've read about the explosion and fire. They weren't accidental. When I think of poor Knowles I get angry. I could hit someone—"

"Even on a full stomach?"

"Well, perhaps not on a full stomach," he smiled, and it was evident to her interested gaze that some of the tension holding him taut relaxed. "You know, Sylvia, when I think of those days we had last summer, and . . . ." He dragged himself back to what was bothering him. "If I can't make the Board see sense I'm going to throw in my hand."

"Quit?"

"I don't like the way you say that, young lady. No, I'm not going to quit. But I would prefer to be with an outfit that

saw eye to eye with me. There's an American scientist in this country—I know he's still here, though he doesn't do anything to get talked about in the newspapers—his name's Kindermart."

"I've heard my father mention him."

"He's good. Brilliant man. Got sound ideas about atomic research, and I'd like to work with him on the practical side. I'm against this international rivalry in such matters, and I think the whole thing's too big for one nation and certainly for one company, even such a modern mammoth as the Drumburgh outfit."

"And where do I come into the picture? I do, don't I?"

"You certainly do. If I leave the Drumburgh Trust I want you to marry me as soon as I've fixed up with Kindermart and—"

"But suppose you leave and don't fix up with Kindermart?" she inquired gently.

"I don't intend to do that—not unless the Board's damned obdurate."

"They can be."

"Don't I know it! Why if it hadn't been for your father, Sylvia, I would have left years ago. But he and I saw things in the same light. He gave me a free hand within the limits of the organization, and he was a tower of strength, and I can tell you I needed a tower of strength at times. It hasn't been easy trying to run something and keep it from the ears and eyes of the other companies, who have been damned suspicious."

"Good Lord, Jimmy, you don't suspect the factory was sabotaged by one of the other Drumburgh companies? The idea's ludicrous."

"I don't know. I haven't any facts. But, Sylvia, nothing would surprise me. Nothing. I shouldn't even be surprised

if Terrington were conspiring against the group."

She looked at him soberly.

"Nor would I, since you mention it."

He looked at her. "Oh, so you've seen things, then?"

"Well, not actually seen, Jimmy. But I don't like this strange amalgamation with Cashern, because I don't like Cashern, and Mother does. Daddy didn't like him, either."

Murchison met her gaze.

"You know," he said, "I can't understand why your father didn't like my friendship with you, Sylvia." His lips compressed. "I didn't like having to sneak that holiday with you behind his back. It was a — well, it could have spoiled things if you hadn't been so wonderful, Sylvia."

"Was I wonderful?" she asked softly.

"More wonderful than that." He reached out and took one of her hands. "Darling, it's because I hate subterfuge and make-shift arrangements that I've got to bring this thing — and us, what we mean to each other — to some definite understanding. I want to get myself — well, right with myself, if you can follow me."

"Yes, I can follow you, Jimmy," she told him. "And I'm glad. But don't judge my father too harshly. He loved me in his own fashion, Jimmy. But he was jealous in his love. It was as though he was afraid to share it. As though . . . ." She shook her head. "I don't know how to explain it. But I've the feeling that if I'd had a brother living at home with us things would have been different. The atmosphere would have been different — life would have been different, for my mother —"

"Sylvia," he said, "don't try to explain. Your father was a man who didn't mix family and work. Let's leave it at that. Who am I, anyway, to say he was wrong because he didn't want me for a son-in-law? After all, a man has a right to look after his own daughter, do what he thinks is right to protect her

from any other scheming males hanging about — ”

“And so you admit you’re a scheming male, Jimmy?” she laughed, withdrawing her hand.

“Definitely, where you are concerned. Sylvia, we’ve got to get this thing straightened out. I can’t think, I’m confused. I want to sit down and talk to you, and — ”

“If you want to unload what’s on your mind, Jimmy, that’s simple,” she told him. “Come along home with me.”

The suggestion caused him to blink.

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Well, for one thing, your mother — ”

“Won’t know. The house is quite big. And I’d love to annoy Arthur.” She looked at him pertly. “Wouldn’t you?”

At her challenge he grinned.

“I’m beginning to think I’ve fallen for a minx,” he said lightly.

“You have. And fallen hard, I hope.”

“I didn’t mean it that way.”

“I know you didn’t. So come along and talk.”

“But really, Sylvia — ”

“Yes, really. I don’t like playing pretenses. Come on.”

He found himself impelled out of the restaurant and into a taxi, and his protests were skillfully swept aside by a delectable creature with adorable lights in her eyes and a smiling mouth that made him forget his anger and hurry and confusion and long to kiss its inviting lips.

She hurried him into one of the large ground-floor rooms of Craven Court, perched herself in an armchair, legs tucked under her body, and waited for him to talk. And James Murchison, after a somewhat self-conscious start, in which he found the bright eyes of the girl he loved no help in collecting his thoughts, talked.

He told her of his hopes and dreams, of what he believed in and what he had learned of her father's aspirations, and enthusiasm crept into his voice, giving it a ringing quality that the listening girl found fascinating.

"Jimmy," she said softly, "I'll marry you any time you say, dear."

He had finished his personal narrative, and she was watching him, lips slightly parted, her pencil-thin brows kinked together. He looked rather boyish as he sat in the armchair opposite and smoked a cigarette. The enthusiasm that had colored his voice a few moments before was still mirrored in his face. He was a different being from the uncertain young man who had eaten food in a Soho restaurant while she watched him.

"My God, Sylvia, you make me feel—"

"Good, I hope," said this amazing girl. "I want to. I want you to see this Kindermart and tell him what you told me. Then see where you stand with the Board. They'll eat out of your hand."

"Heavens, Sylvia, you're a tonic. You can bolster up my ego and give me just that extra ounce of assurance that I know I need."

"Rubbish. It isn't assurance you want. It's belief in yourself. My father always held that the man who believed in himself didn't have to bother with what other people thought. It didn't matter."

They were still on the same intimate plane when an interruption came in the form of a message that there was a caller who wished to see Sylvia. The caller appeared to be a young gentleman with a large brown package under his arm.

Appeared is no less than the truth, for Peter Burgoyne was standing in the doorway before the announcement was completed. He had a wild, half-hunted look that instantly won Sylvia's sympathy. She dismissed the servant and he retired.

The young man came forward hesitantly, saw Murchison, and choked.

Murchison scowled.

"Well, my lad, where in hades have you slunk to? The police have been hunting for you high and low."

The young man put down his package.

"They found me. Slade did, and he's had a tail on me ever since, but I've managed to shake him. I had to come here, and bring this."

He pointed to the package.

"What is it?" Sylvia asked.

For answer he tipped off the brown paper, and revealed the picture Cashern had sent by Smailey to Salchester.

Sylvia gasped.

"So you've seen it before?" Burgoyne said quickly.

She faced up to the situation.

"Yes, it used to hang in my father's study."

"Your father." He seemed disturbed at the words, and made a visible effort to gain control. "You are Sylvia."

He did not ask a question; he made a statement.

"Yes, I'm Sylvia Chawson," she said gravely. "And you are —"

"Burgoyne," he said.

As soon as he had spoken he became strangely excited. He moved towards her and gripped her by the shoulders.

"Let me look at you, let me see what you're really like. I — I somehow . . . Forgive me, but —"

That was as far as he got. Murchison was out of his chair and hauling the younger man round to face him.

"That's no way to treat a lady, Burgoyne," he said thickly. "Not the one I'm going to marry, anyway."

Burgoyne stared at him, mouth agape for some moments and then burst out laughing.

"That's good, that's damned rich," he said.

Murchison looked angry enough to start a fight. Sylvia put out a timid hand and plucked at his coat sleeve. He looked at her, and she shook her head.

"Burgoyne, you've managed to make a complete ass of yourself. If you're not entirely out of your mind," he said sarcastically, "what's the idea of coming here and bringing this picture?"

Burgoyne stopped laughing suddenly. The effect was startling. The others realized that he had not laughed because he had been amused. He was fast approaching the end of a nervous tether.

"I wanted to see my sister," he said.

Murchison stood very still. Sylvia's eyes widened.

"I wanted to see my sister," Burgoyne repeated, "and ask her about this picture of my mother. Oh, I know I'm on the wrong side of the blanket. My mother — God knows why he didn't marry her! He's been keeping her — and me — for years. And I thought his interest in me . . . ." He gulped. "Oh, to hell with his interest in me! I want to know about this picture. Why did he keep it, where did it come from, and why was it sent to me? Why, why? I want the answers. I want to know — damn it, I came in here chock-full of questions, and now I can't think, my head's spinning. I wanted to see my sister. I know she's my sister. I know Drumburgh's our father. But she's legitimate. I'm the — "

Sylvia had sprung forward and caught his arm.

"Don't," she begged. "Sit down. We've got to untangle quite a skein, I can see. And you've got to get calm." She smiled at him. "I don't even know your first name."

"Peter," he said.

Murchison fumbled for his cigarette case and held it out.

"Damn it," he said, "I came up here to have some woe of

my own, not to share in . . . ." He broke off, his cigarette unlighted. "You've read this morning's papers?" he asked.

"Papers! God, I don't want to see another — ever. I just — "

"All right, take it easy. I can guess how you feel. But you'd better know that last night there was an explosion at the factory and a fire. Poor Knowles was burned to death. He hadn't a chance."

The news seemed to affect the younger man strangely. He spun round, jerking his arm free from Sylvia's fingers.

"Knowles!" he said. "By heaven, this beats all! I've been going over things — everything — and I'm convinced now Drumburgh was my father. There's no other explanation. And he was with my mother the night they were killed. Thinking back, I recalled something Knowles told me — oh, some time ago — and I'd forgotten. He said once he knew more about Drumburgh's life than Drumburgh thought anyone knew. It came to me last night. I heard Knowles' drawling voice, almost apologetic. And suddenly I knew what I had to do. I had to come and see my half-sister and bring this picture. Then we could both tackle Knowles. But now — now we can't," he ended lamely, his face dropping.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A WHITTLING PROCESS

PETER BURGOYNE had been mistaken when he said he had shaken the detective set to watch him. The man had been an old hand at trailing a suspect, and he had followed the young man without the latter knowing. Then he had reported to the Yard. Windrop, who had been waiting for some report to come through on the check-up of the tommy gun, took over, until Slade returned from Surrey and went into another conference with the A.C. Progress was being made, the A.C. agreed. It was quite an achievement to have jockeyed a man of Sharpoll's caliber into a position where he was ready to talk even if he insisted it was off the record.

"You see, sir," Slade pointed out, "if I can clear up the muddle of this scheme to outwit the Drumburgh Trust—"

"Outwit!" the A.C. exclaimed. "Damn it, I own some shares in Drumburgh Trust, and, speaking for myself, I think the whole thing's been a criminal conspiracy."

"I agree, sir," Slade said, with a very straight face. "But only a paper conspiracy, unless we can prove criminal action."

"What about Kindermart?"

"He's a free agent. He could refuse to go in with the Sharpoll mob."

The A.C. made an impatient gesture.

"You know, Slade," he said, "it's a damned outrage the way share-pushers and market-riggers like Sharpoll are able to operate and get away with it every time. But don't let me interrupt. You're clearing up a muddle, I think you said."

"When it is cleared up, as I see it," Slade told him, "there will be this elusive Frenchman to find. He seems to be the center of interest now."

"And you've nothing on him?"

"Nothing, except what I've put in my reports."

"Incredible — positively incredible! The whole thing is utterly bizarre. This explosion now, what's the point of it?"

"It could hold up production."

"Do you think that was the reason?"

"I don't know, sir. I admit that it seems strange on the face of it that sabotage should be employed now instead of before murder. However one views the possible reason, it doesn't seem altogether to make sense."

"It's sheer damned nonsense," Slade was told. "That's what I personally find so galling. We go round and round in circles. This case is like a vortex. It spins round on itself. One doesn't get anywhere."

"Presumably that's what the criminal wants," Slade said mildly.

"Eh? The criminal . . . . Oh, yes, I get your point. True, very true. But when do you think you'll start coming — um — out of the vortex, if I may put it like that?"

"Very soon," Slade promised

The A.C. looked sharply at him.

"You do? Good. All right, Slade, keep at it."

Slade kept at it to such good purpose that by late that evening he had almost neutralized the various interests he had to understand. Windrop had done a smart piece of work by calling on Sadie Ginsetter and finding Bullman at home, and because Bullman became firmly convinced that Oscar Sharpoll had given the police his whereabouts he felt very sore, an impression Slade did not concern himself to correct. So that by ten o'clock he could reasonably account for Bullman and Shar-

poll and the various people at Craven Court.

By that time, too, he knew what concentration of forces had produced a new trio of interests — Sylvia, Peter Burgoyne, and Murchison. Clinton was in London, having come south on the same train as Murchison, and he had been able to add a few additional details to Slade's store of knowledge about the growing list of individuals in the case.

But in the process of neutralizing these various interests Slade had left himself with virtually no prime suspect. Murchison had been away from the factory at times that coincided with the meetings between Sharpoll and the unknown Frenchman, and he had been away at the time of the shooting of Lord Drumburgh. But there was the case of Betty Marsh. Murchison did not fit in as the girl's murderer, and Slade was convinced the same person strangled the girl that shot Drumburgh and Carlotta Burgoyne. In the same way he had considered Peter Burgoyne as a suspect, but had cancelled him out. His coming to London, his having the tommy-gun, his violent personality, his attempt to intimidate Bullman — it didn't any of it add up to real participation in murder. Again, Burgoyne had been in London the previous night. He could not have arranged the explosion at the factory, although, on the other hand, Murchison could. In fact, apart from the case of Betty Marsh, there was a more concrete chain of evidence against Murchison than anyone, not excepting Bullman. For not only had Sharpoll been able to give his henchman an alibi for the previous night, but Sadie Ginsetter had voluntarily confirmed it.

Smailey was out too. He had been able to satisfy Slade that, tricky though he was, he had not been able to solve the fundamental principle of being in two places at the same time. But it was while considering Smailey in relation to the others that Slade hit upon a disturbing possibility. Suppose Murchison had been working with someone else? Then that someone

could have killed Betty Marsh, and Murchison would be . . . .

He didn't proceed with the argument. It was dangerous. He had nothing save supposition to justify it, and in a long life of police work Slade had learned how little supposition unsupported can be made to justify itself.

Again there was a stumbling block, and although stumbling-blocks were nuisances he readily admitted them.

Sharpoll, after returning from Thornlea, had sent round to the Yard the violin case and the note that had accompanied the tommy-gun. Which once more brought Slade back to consideration of the mysterious Frenchman. This was the one really tangible connection with the man. There was the phone call for Sharpoll at Thornlea, but as Slade had not personally listened in to the conversation between the financier and the unknown he discounted it as having any direct value for his consideration.

He knew before six o'clock in the evening that the tommy-gun was the weapon that had fired the shots responsible for the deaths of Lord Drumburgh and Mrs. Burgoyne, and by half-past eight he had a report from Windrop, who was following up the matter, that the tommy-gun was of an identifiable pattern, and had been traced from a Northern factory to an airfield in the Midlands from which for several months before D-Day special liaison agents had been dropped to link up with the Resistance forces on the Continent. The tommy-gun in question was one of a number dropped on the night of April 4, 1944, with others in a special container, for the use of members of the French Maquis. The containers and three liaison agents had parachuted down not far from Grenoble.

"I got a lead on the containers, as they came from a Liverpool factory," Windrop reported, "and were sent straight to the airfield. They'd been made—can you beat it?—by Littlewood's, the football pool people, were sent to the airfield,

and packed on the spot. The tommy-guns were made by a firm who, before the war, produced kitchen coppers and mangles. But that's the end of the trail. The container and the gun go down through the clouds over the country around Grenoble, and after that . . . ."

After that there was a blank.

At the extreme end of the blank was the mysterious figure of a man who called himself Monsieur Hirondelle . . . . Mister Swallow. He may have been a member of the Maquis who had come by the tommy-gun, in the first place, in the legitimate way of a warrior fighting furtively to free his country of the invader. Or the original member of the Maquis who received the tommy-gun may have been someone else, and it was conceivable that the gun had passed through many hands before it reached those of Monsieur Hirondelle.

But it was something more than mere coincidence, Slade felt, that the actual weapon should have been parachuted over France all those months ago and that the unknown who had provided the Sharpoll plotters with their information should have been a Frenchman. It was almost as if a fantastic character had been tardily created to fit the part of Drumburgh's murderer. And yet, as Slade realized, that could not be the case. Sharpoll had not been lying when he told of the mysterious Frenchman. He had been very concerned, at the time, for the safety of his own skin.

He examined the violin case. It told him nothing, save that the sender had a possible mordant sense of humor. The man had moved in obscurity. He had been little more than a voice at the end of a telephone line, and he had suddenly decided to speak as he had to Sharpoll at Thornlea. Why? To frighten the man? That was possible, but as an answer it supplied another tedious why. Bluff? Again that was possible, but yet once more — why?

Slade tried to get a line on a member of the French Resistance Movement known as Monsieur Hirondelle through the Information Office of the French Embassy, but found that they could not help him. A call was put through to Paris, and from there an inquiry was directed to Grenoble. It took just over a couple of hours, but at the end of that time Slade was where he had been for the past twelve hours. The Grenoble office of the Sureté Nationale, which held the documentary records of the local Maquis, held no reference to the membership or exploits of a partisan who went under the *nom de guerre* of Monsieur Hirondelle. The Grenoble office was very sorry that they were unable to oblige in the matter, and their sorrow was faithfully transmitted to London by the member of the Sureté Générale with whom Slade spoke on the Paris wire.

Monsieur Hirondelle remained a figure shrouded in shadows, a voice in a void, intangible as a wraith.

But wraiths are not in the habit of carrying and using tommy-guns, and Monsieur Hirondelle, for all his care and caution in the matter, seemed to have got himself very much under suspicion of shooting Drumburgh. The known facts, anyway, could be read to point to this Frenchman's participation in the Moonby Street shooting. Slade was less ready to risk an opinion in the matter of the murder of Betty Marsh. But there was one slim chance of getting a lead. At the publichouse behind Moonby Street where earlier inquiry had produced the fact that Bullman had made her acquaintance.

Slade arrived at the uninviting door of the hostelry's saloon bar a few minutes before closing time, and succeeded in conveying a sense of urgency to the proprietor, a slim man with bald head and a villainous cast in his left eye. When he spoke he flashed golden dentures at the man from Scotland Yard, and there was a diamond in the ring on the little finger of his right hand that winked with roguish abandon. Slade felt that

George Sellars was the sort of publican who made it his business to know all there was to be known about his customers.

For all that, Mr. Sellars was reluctant to discuss his patrons with a police officer. It took him almost until closing time to recall Betty Marsh.

"Yes, I know the girl, and I know she was murdered," he told Slade. "But it's something else again to remember her personally, if you know what I mean, and anyone who used to come in here with her. We get scores of people—"

"But not Frenchmen."

That simple statement caused Mr. Sellars' left eye to roam the precincts of the saloon bar in a hopeless attempt to focus on Slade's face.

"No, not Frenchmen," he agreed. "So, a Frenchman, eh? No, I don't recall a Frenchman. No, not a Frenchman. Sorry."

Slade spoke to the two barmen and the three barmaids who relaxed when the last customer had been shown outside, protesting and hiccuping with a persistence that was tearfully alcoholic. The hiccups faded, and a bolt slammed down in its socket. The barman who had closed the door lit a cigarette.

"Thought we'd have trouble," he told a smoke-ring sailing ceilingwards.

"Naw, they're just a lot of blab-mouths. It's the ones that don't talk that make trouble—what I call trouble."

Slade looked at the woman who had spoken. She was not under forty, but he couldn't guess how much over she had gone. The smear of cheap cosmetics on her face was as masking as a coat of distemper.

"Did the Frenchman talk — or make trouble?" Slade asked quietly.

She put down the square of chipped mirror into which she was trying to insert a complete vision of her head and hat, and looked at Slade with cold gray eyes.

"Which Frenchman?" the woman inquired, curiously.

"The one who came in here with Betty Marsh."

The barman by the door stood with feet apart, smoking his cigarette and screwing up his blunt features in a terrific effort of mental concentration. The woman dropped her mirror into a commodious handbag, and ran the tip of a finger over her bright red lips.

"Oh, that one," she said.

Slade nodded.

"That one," he agreed.

The woman's red lips curved reflectively. For a moment the point of a pink tongue showed between her too-even white teeth.

"He wasn't the sort to make trouble — not out loud, anyway. But my guess is he had a temper. Yeah, the devil's own twin of a temper."

Interesting, but not specially informative. Slade glanced at Mr. Sellars, who was chewing his nether lip and at the same time making a series of vague clucking sounds, which might have indicated disapproval.

"You shouldn't have taken so many nips, Alice," he remonstrated, that left eye of his wildly searching the bar's confines.

Alice had spirit of her own, as she manifested with brisk assurance.

"Nips, is it? Listen, Mr. Sellars, if you're accusing me of — "

Too late the master of bad tactics tried to extricate himself.

"I'm not accusing you, Alice."

"Then I'd like to know what else you call it when you stand there and say to my face — "

"I'm not accusing you, Alice. I'm trying to tell you to be discreet."

"Discreet, me!" Among the virtues of positive merit Alice

imagined she possessed was discretion. "Why, damn it all, if it hadn't been for me — "

George Sellars approached her.

"Shut up, damn you," he growled.

Slade tapped him on the shoulder.

"All right, I'll take over now. You've done enough, I think."

Mr. Sellars opened a cavernous mouth and the light from the dusty electric bulbs ricochetted from his dental gilt. He shut it abruptly.

"Oh, hell," he muttered, and turning his back, slouched out of the bar.

The barman who had closed and bolted the door grinned, and blew another flock of smoke hoops towards the dingy ceiling.

"You've made him mad, Alice," he said. "The guv'nor ain't nice when he's mad."

Alice's gray eyes snapped.

"Naw? Let me tell you something, Jim. He ain't nice when he ain't mad."

Jim frowned, trying to work it out.

Slade said, "Getting back to the Frenchman — "

"Listen," he was told by an irate woman, "you started this thing. I ain't never been with that Frenchman. I ain't never had anything to do with him. But I still say he had a helluva temper, and when he let it off the string — phew-ee!" She pursed her lips to make the sound, and then used the *mouse* to grip a cigarette. She ran a pink-tipped match along the bar counter and held the flame to the little white cylinder. Smoke poured in twin streams from her nose. Without taking the cigarette from her mouth she said, "If you want to know about the Frenchman, ask Daisy."

It required no great effort of deduction to decide which of the other females in the bar was Daisy. A black-haired woman,

some years younger than Alice, came forward, lips compressed into a thin red line, and dark eyes angry.

"You heard the guv'nor — shut up."

Alice shrugged her shoulders into a cheap fur coat and patted the collar under her chin.

"You know what I think about him — and you," she said, and walked to the door.

"Just a minute," said Slade.

Alice dragged her step and paused, turned, and glanced archly at the detective.

"Well?"

She said it distantly, as though she had already left the bar and no longer belonged to its company.

"I want to find that Frenchman."

There was a sharp sobbing sound. Slade glanced round quickly. Daisy's gloved hand had gone to her mouth, and she was looking at him through eyes filled with fear.

"You're from the police," she accused.

The temperature of the bar tumbled to frosty limits. Jim hunched himself together and sucked air noisily. Alice drew her coat more closely round her buxom figure. The other barman stopped paring his fingernails and scowled at the picture of a bibulous Scottish chieftain sporting with an outsize bottle of distilled Spey water. The third barmaid, who stood beside Daisy, folded her arms and squinted at the man who had suddenly become something sub-human.

"And I'm trying to find a murderer," Slade said evenly, keeping his temper. "Betty Marsh was strangled. It might not have been Betty Marsh. It might have been one of you women — "

He was interrupted by a harsh laugh from Alice.

"That's a good one," she said bitingly.

"Don't," said Daisy. "Don't you dare, or I'll — "

"Or you'll what?" Alice challenged, turning round and facing the assembled company.

"Aw, leave her alone," said the other barman. "You women are all the damned same. Squabbles, cutting each other's throats when there's anything around in trousers, and then —"

"Lay off," said Jim slowly.

Slade thought fast. The situation, as the military commentators had been in the habit of saying, was showing signs of deteriorating. And fast.

He had come into the bar to find out if anyone there remembered seeing a Frenchman speaking to Betty Marsh, and the request had resulted in the releasing of an angry tide of feeling. He had sent an inquiry across hundreds of miles to the Vosges, and had discovered nothing. Here, almost on his own doorstep, he had touched something quick and responsive, something which just at that moment threatened to get out of control unless he acted adroitly.

"Take it easy," he cautioned. "I don't want any funny business. You, Daisy, if you know anything about this Frenchman who came here with Betty Marsh —"

"He didn't," said the woman sobbingly. "Oh, he didn't. He didn't see her, never set eyes on her, until after he'd been going with me for — months. I swear it!"

Daisy, Slade believed, would tell any lie, however grotesque and fantastic, and never count the cost, if she thought it would in any way serve to protect the man she loved.

At her words the others relaxed. They tried looking anywhere except at the unhappy woman.

"I'm sorry," Slade said. "But I've got to ask questions. It's my job, and —"

"Then ask her why the heck he hasn't shown up tonight," said Alice, still with a trace of malice. "She told us he's in London again. Came today —"

Alice dodged through the door just in time to avoid the empty beer bottle flung with angry force by the distracted Daisy.

The bottle splintered against the woodwork and tinkled to the floor.

Jim tore the wet butt of his cigarette from the corner of his under lip and dropped it on the floor. He pushed the toe of his cracked boot over it and rubbed the charred tobacco into the bare floor boards.

"Women!" he grunted.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE DARK

IN THE DARKNESS OF the interior of the police car Daisy dried her eyes and did something to repair the damage to her complexion caused by tears. She sniffed, and the reek of her cheap perfume seemed to fill the confined space. Slade quietly dropped a window.

"Feel better?" he inquired.

She nodded in the darkness.

"Yes," she said, after a pause.

"All right, then. Now, Daisy, I want you to tell me about this Frenchman — "

She caught his arm, and her fingers pressed into his muscle.

"Look," she said, "I couldn't say anything in there. I just couldn't. That Alice — "

"No love lost between you, is there?"

"She thought Henri would fall for her, and she's been like the cat that never got the cream ever since."

"But you and Henri — you got along together."

There was a sniff before she said, "Yes, me and Henri — well, it was like in a movie. He just came into the bar one day — months ago — and he looked at me, and — and that's all there is to it."

Slade didn't hurry her. But after a suitable interval inquired mildly, "That was . . . all?"

The query produced some more sniffs.

"No. He doesn't stay long in London. Only a few days at a time. Sometimes only overnight. And he stays — well, there's

nowhere you can get a place these days, so you see I—”

“All right, Daisy,” Slade said gently. “You put him up in your place.”

“That’s right. I’ve only the two rooms. I’m at the top of the house, and — well, he likes it, and really he — he’s different from the others.”

“Different?”

There was a longer pause this time. Slade waited. Finally his patience was rewarded. She said, “I didn’t want to tell you this. I don’t think I ought to now. But I think of that Betty Marsh, and — no, he couldn’t, not Henri!”

Slade knew she was shivering. He could hear the faint rustle of her clothes as her body shrank inside them in the darkness of the car. He heard her catch her breath, shudderingly, as though she had found a new fear.

“What is it that’s troubling you, Daisy?” he asked. “Don’t be afraid. You’ve got nothing to be scared of now, you know.”

She said quietly, but with a slight trembling in her voice, “He speaks in broken English, and he talks like a gentleman. Oh, he’s got a way with him. There’s something about him that’s — tender. I don’t know how old he is. Older than me. Quite a few years. Somehow you can’t talk to him about those sort of things. Personal things, I mean. There’s a look about him. He’s friendly, yes — but there’s something that stops one getting too friendly, if you know what I mean. Do you?”

“I can guess.”

“He sleeps on the couch in the sitting room,” she said. “To hear Alice one would think things. But he’s not like that. He — he’s not like anyone I ever met before in all my life. That’s what’s so — so wonderful about him.”

She seemed to have wandered into contemplation of fresh thoughts. Slade tried to draw her back to her former theme.

“There’s something you’re going to tell me, Daisy. Some-

thing you didn't want to tell me, but you thought you had better get it off your chest. Remember?"

Again he caught the faint rustling sound of her clothes as her body quivered with fear.

She said dully, "He's always pretended to be a Frenchman."

Slade started. He peered at her, but could not make out her features in the pale blur that was her face.

"Pretended?" he said.

"Yes. He said he was French. He came from a place in the South of France, and was very bitter about the Germans. He was in the Resistance Movement—"

"What was the name of the village?"

"I don't know. But he showed me a postcard one day of a town — Gren something or other. He said the village wasn't many miles from the town."

"Would the name be Grenoble?"

"Grenoble, that's it. I remember now that you say it. It comes back to me. But I can't remember the name of the village. It's a funny name, though. La — La — No, it's no good, I can't make it."

"Never mind. Grenoble, that's something." Secretly Slade was thinking it was more than just something. It was as though Fortune had suddenly decided to stop playing tricks with him. "And his name, Daisy? What was that? Henri — what?"

"Henri Dulappe."

"Spell it."

She did so.

"And you still say he only pretended to be a Frenchman, Daisy?"

She nodded. He saw the pale blur of her face move.

"How can you be sure?"

"Because a Frenchman wouldn't speak English in his sleep, would he?"

It was Slade's turn to remain thoughtful. He felt tremendously excited. This young woman who worked in a frowzy public house in a back street of Mayfair was being of more direct help than anyone who had moved across the crowded stage of the present murder drama. Unwittingly she was giving meaning to the involved and perplexing mystery expounded by Oscar Sharpoll and his confederates.

Monsieur Hirondelle spoke English in his sleep. He could not be found in London because he was hiding in a cheap little two-room flat rented by a woman who was away all day working for her living. It was simple enough to be laughable — and true.

"You heard him," he said at last. "You can be sure."

He made the words statements, not questions.

"Yes, I had a toothache one night, and couldn't sleep. I'd got a bottle of aspirin in the drawer of the cupboard in the sitting room, and I went to get some. I tried to move quietly, so as not to disturb him. I heard him talking to himself, and thought at first he wasn't asleep. But he was. I soon realized that. He was talking in his sleep, and he was restless, too. Turning this way and that."

"You heard him," he said at last. "You can be sure."

"Bits — odd words. They didn't seem to make sense. But they weren't in French, and his voice sounded different. Like one of those college professors they have on the radio sometimes. Refined, but angry. Yes, it was angry. He seemed worried about something, as though it was preying on his mind. It fair made me ache to do something for him. But I couldn't let on. I was scared in case I should drop a word any time that would let him suspect I knew his secret."

"Perhaps there was something preying on his mind, Daisy."

"You mean Betty . . . . Oh, Gawd, I — I think I'd sooner him be anything than — "

She choked. Slade put a reassuring hand on her arm.

"All right, Daisy. Now I want you to relax. Don't let this thing worry you."

"How can I help letting it worry me?" she asked, with reason.

Slade could not tell her. He said, "Don't you remember any of the words you heard him mutter in his sleep?"

But on that point she was obdurate, and Slade was not convinced that she was being truthful. It could be that, out of a mistaken sense of loyalty, she was withholding some evidence that would be really helpful. But the Yard man felt that he could not press her too far. What she had already confided to him had been told against every instinct. She was deeply in love with the man in her own fashion. If pressed too far it was even possible that, woman-like, she might retract what she had already said and prove a considerable hindrance to his plans.

"He is spending tonight at your place, isn't he, Daisy?" he said.

In view of what Alice had said she could not deny the truth of this.

"Yes," she said. "I expected him to come and meet me tonight. He usually does when in London. Most times he drops in and has a drink before closing time, but tonight . . . Funny, I've never known him miss before."

"Daisy," Slade said, "I think we'd better go along to your flat, and see if friend Henri is waiting for you. If he is he may have news. Anyway, he can probably help me quite a bit."

"No," she said, "I don't want to. He'll think I've betrayed him."

"He can't if he's got nothing to keep concealed from the police," Slade pointed out.

"Seems fair enough," she admitted slowly. "But all the

same, I've got a feeling — an uncomfortable feeling — and I don't know that I should. After all — ”

“After all,” Slade interjected smoothly, “you've got yourself to think of, Daisy. You've got to remember that if your friend has been up to no good you'll have to think of yourself. You don't want to be waking up one morning and finding you've got to appear in court, do you?”

It was obvious stuff, but Slade knew Daisy's type. She had a morbid fear of police courts that was instinctive and almost traditional.

“No,” she said again, but with less resolve. “I — I . . . . Gawd, I don't know what to do for the best. That's the truth!”

“Then do as I suggest, Daisy,” Slade told her, and against his persistence and refusal to show annoyance she finally surrendered her mental objections.

She sank back against the cold leather upholstery of the car, and Slade spoke a word to the driver. The police car drew away from the curb, and Slade relaxed. However, choked sounds from beside him told him that Daisy was once more finding this upheaval in her emotions too much for her to bear without the solace of tears.

The car drove to a small Paddington street, and Slade told the driver to park round the next corner, where a long, blank factory wall suggested a suitable place. He and the woman walked back, turned into the street in which she lived, and approached the house where she occupied the two top rooms at the back.

The street was deserted. Dance music from a radio poured from a house they passed. The street had no character, and wore an air of shrinking retirement. The chipped bricks of the house fronts and the paper-strewn areas flanking the broken flight of steps to the front doors truly symbolized the leanness of the years that had descended upon Tanner Street.

Daisy opened the front door of one of the houses and led the way up a dingy staircase lit with a low-turned gas jet that made continuous plopping sounds and sent a stream of soot towards the ceiling. They climbed the first two landings, and then the woman hesitated.

"I don't want to go in. I've a feeling . . . ."

She fumbled with her handbag and produced the key of her flat. She held it out to Slade.

"I'd sooner you went in first. I don't like it. I keep telling you."

She was suffering from an attack of nerves. Now that the moment for confronting Henri Dulappe had arrived she feared the consequence of disclosure. She had neither the heart to stand by while the man's cloak of pretense was torn from him nor the courage to face up to the possible result of bringing him suddenly face to face with a detective.

Daisy had come almost as far as she could bring herself. She had neither the will nor the wish to continue. She wanted the worst to happen — if it had to — without her being present to witness it.

Slade took the key without saying a word, and crossed her on the stairs.

"You can't miss it," she called after him, in a kind of exaggerated stage whisper. "It's the door you come straight on at the end of the landing at the back."

Slade climbed into the shadows and stepped out upon the uncarpeted landing of the top floor. There was no light. He felt in his pocket and produced a small pencil-shaped flashlight that he had carried ever since the days of the black-out. By its ray he surveyed the dirty and paint-blistered wall of the landing well. There was a stale smell about the place, as though fresh air did not often find its way into this box-like compartment.

He raised the beam and directed it towards the door ahead,

at the back of the house. It was a door that had long before required painting. There were patches where the bare wood was exposed, and scratches at the base suggested that either Daisy or some previous tenant had at one time kept a dog. There were two locks on the door. One large old-fashioned lock was plainly never used. There was red rust on the key-hole cover. The second lock, fitted higher up the door, was a modern circular brass lock. Slade inserted the key quietly and turned it. The door opened without a sound.

Beyond was darkness. Slade's tiny beam of light cut it like a sword slicing black velvet. It reached out and found a table and chairs, pictures on a light-papered wall, and then stopped, focused on a cigarette butt in an ash tray on the mantelpiece. Smoke was rising from the squeezed end. Whoever had put the butt there had pressed it out — or thought he had — and within the past few seconds. Slade was aware in that moment of the smell of cigarette smoke.

His torch beam went out.

In the same moment he became aware of something dark and alive springing towards him. He had barely time to turn, and then he was fighting with an unknown assailant, who was armed with a club-like implement, which he was endeavoring to swing against the detective's head.

Slade ducked and rolled from side to side, but the other came after him, and the cudgel kept swinging menacingly in the darkness. Slade took a couple of heavy jabs on his forearms, which half numbed those members, and then he stumbled against a chair. Before he could right himself the other was on his back, clinging like a leech, and trying to bear him to the ground.

There was a good deal of panting from this unknown assailant, but the man did not speak, and by no sound betrayed his nationality. He was grimly determined that the Yard

man should not escape him or shine his revealing torch ray on his face. Slade realized after some moments that his assailant was endeavoring to make sure that the torch was smashed in the struggle.

The detective tried to work his way back towards the door, where the light switch of the room must be situated. But the other must have understood his intention, for the man made frantic efforts to keep the Yard man back. Slade was punching out with both fists, and when he caught his adversary in the face he made the man grunt deeply, and he received the impression that the unknown was an older man than himself.

"Dulappe," he said, "you may as well give in. You won't—"

The other was quick to take advantage of Slade's momentary relaxation. He came springing in from the other side, and an arm snaked out and circled the detective's neck. Slade jerked back, and delivered a couple of short-arm jabs to the other's middle, which made the man breathe with quick sobbing intakes of breath. But the man was game. He was prepared to take punishment if that was the only way he could secure the advantage he wanted.

He hung on, and gradually forced the Yard man's head down. Slade realized his intention. Having been unable to club the detective into unconsciousness by direct attacks, he was aiming to hold down the Yard man's head by force and then swing a short-delivery blow at it.

Slade strained his body backwards, and the other came with him, hanging tight and close. Back Slade went, until his back ached as though he had strained every muscle beneath his shoulders. Suddenly the strain was gone. The other man's feet slid from under him and he toppled over, still clinging to Slade's neck.

The weight of the man's falling body pulled the detective over after him, and both men fell headlong, collapsing against

another chair, which went over with a splintering crash in the darkness. The breath was shaken from the Yard man's body.

"Dulappe," he tried again. "You're not doing yourself any good with this—"

A knee caught him under the chin, forcing his head back with a suddenness that sent a band of circling pain round his neck. The treacherous blow made Slade angry. He shook his head to clear it, and then squirmed over, feeling for his adversary's face. The swinging club came down on his hand, numbing the fingers. Instinctively he ducked his head, and this time the cudgel fell against his shoulder, and red-hot spikes of pain went shooting down his left side.

"Damn you, I'll—"

The other laughed, a thin trickle of sound that held no note of enjoyment. But its very derisive quality made Slade even more angry. Silently he cursed himself for coming into the room alone, knowing what he might have to contend with, for the man was a murderer, who . . . .

His train of thought snapped as a shoe punched against his stomach. He caught the leg and wrenched. A gasp came from the other, and then the other shoe caught the detective on his numb shoulder.

He tried to roll away, but the other man was following him over the floor, swinging the club all the time. And try as he might Slade could do nothing against the rhythmic certainty of those swings. His assailant held the advantage and knew it. What was more, he plainly had no intention of relinquishing it until he had beaten the detective into unconsciousness. His method was simple and direct, and he was applying it although, as Slade guessed, the man was fast losing his own strength in a contest that, physically, was by no means even.

Slade was not sure how long he could hang on. But before that swinging cudgel knocked him cold he wanted to know

what the man looked like. He felt in his pocket for the torch he had slipped there as soon as the fight had started, and cautiously he maneuvered to get into a position where he could flash it into the other's face. The man's swinging was now more labored, and he took greater time to recover from a blow and deliver another.

Slade tried to disengage, but had no luck. As though aware of the Yard man's purpose, the other kept close after him, raining down a curtain of blows through which Slade had no opportunity to pass unscathed. It was when he was brought up against the table unexpectedly that Slade saw his opportunity and took it. The table pushed him sideways, and the down-swinging club smashed against it with a thud that bounced a china vase to the floor. Slade swung round, inside the arc of the other's aim, and his torch ray leaped toward the man's head. Slade saw the mouth he had punched some minutes before. A trickle of blood seeped from one corner, but the face was framed in a large white bandage that concealed forehead and part of the chin. A pair of dark, flashing eyes stared back along the silver beam of the torch. And those eyes seemed vaguely familiar, but Slade could not place the man. The face was sufficiently concealed by the bandage, which was in one or two places stained with faint patches of yellow.

That was all he saw before the other was upon him again, and the club was descending with sinister directness upon his unprotected head. At the very moment of contact, before Slade slipped to his knees, he heard the man say one word. It was a word never seen in print, and it was not French.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### INCREASING MOMENTUM

SLADE FELT UNDER the weather when he returned to Scotland Yard, but he was resolved to catch up with the man who had given him the slip in Daisy's flat. It was past midnight, but again he got through to Paris, and once more the Sureté contacted Grenoble. This time the request was more specific. Slade wanted information about any Englishman who had lived in the district for some years and afterwards served with the Maquis. He wanted information about anyone calling himself Henri Dulappe. He wanted information about any member of the Maquis who had been picked up by the R.A.F. and brought secretly to England to advise the authorities upon materials and supplies for the partisans, especially if there was any member who went to England and did not return.

In fact, there was quite a lot Slade wanted to know, and the drowsy official in Paris who took down the request was jerked wide awake before the Yard man had finished his list of requests.

"It is very important that I should get the answers to these queries at the earliest you can let me have them," Slade explained. "Upon the speed with which you can assist me in this matter depends whether or not we shall be able to arrest a murderer."

The French official's Gallic imagination was stirred. "He killed a woman, m'sieur?"

"Yes, a young girl. Strangled her."

"Ah!"

"And shot another," the Yard man continued.

"Ah, what you English call the eternal triangle, *oui?*"

Slade said, with feeling, "There are half a dozen triangles mixed up in this case."

The Frenchman was thrilled. Slade rang off and left him to deal with the Grenoble end of the inquiry. He then wrote out a description of the man who had attacked him in the flat, and passed it out to be circulated throughout the London and Home Counties area.

At two o'clock in the morning he thought about making his way towards bed. He was tired, and he had a splitting headache. Furthermore, there was a dull ache below his shoulder where the man he had fought had struck with the club and then kicked him. The more he thought over the procedure followed in that all-in bout the more he became convinced that the man with whom he had grappled had been trained in such combat. He knew that the Maquis had practiced ju-jitsu, and that they had seldom let go of an assailant once they had closed with him. With the Gestapo in the neighborhood it had been vital that no adversary with whom they closed had a chance to get away alive to raise an alarm. Overpowering an adversary had been the first law of self-preservation.

All of which helped to color the picture formed in Slade's mind of the man with whom he had come to grips and whom he was now pursuing. For the first time since he had turned his attention to the case he was engaged on a real man hunt. The case had been crowded with people, all interested in clouding the real issue, and now, after a chance call at a barmaid's top-floor flat, he was at last moving in a straight line.

There was irony in the situation, and more than irony. It was as he was preparing to get into bed that the significance of those yellow stains on the bandage round the man's face occurred to him.

He stood erect at the side of his bed, and grinned at the formal face of the modest alarm clock, which at that moment recorded the hour of twenty minutes to three.

"Picric acid!" he murmured.

Picric acid left bright yellow stains, and it was used on flesh that had been burned. It was not so much in favor these days as it had been back in the 1920's, but it was still a sound and efficacious way of treating burned or scalded flesh.

The man had burned his face badly very recently. That was why he had not called at the public house to meet Daisy. He had phoned her that he was in London and would be coming to the flat. But she had not seen him since he had left London, some while before. He had not been suffering from a burned face then.

Slade drew back the sheets and climbed into bed.

Late as the hour was he could not settle to sleep. The problem he had to solve still remained tantalizingly outlined in his mind. He could not refrain from mentally comparing the night's adventure with the recent explosion and fire that had wrought havoc with the Drumburgh secret plant. Windrop had informed him earlier in the day that Murchison had gone back to the Midlands to see what he could salvage from the wreck. He had not seen Kindermart. Windrop had had an interesting interview with Sylvia, and she had been quite frank about the reason for Murchison's journey south. She had also been equally frank about the cold reception given her half-brother by her mother. But that had made little difference to Peter Burgoyne. He was like a man in a daze. Sylvia had insisted that he stay at the Drumburgh home, and even Terrington had been silent in face of her uncompromising challenge. Sir Morton Cashern had, for some reason best known to himself, remained away from Craven Court for the past twenty-four hours. The effect on Lady Drumburgh had been rather alarm-

ing at first, but according to the latest reports — retailed over the phone to Windrop by her daughter — she had staged a remarkable recovery and had even spoken to Burgoyne at dinner. Possibly a letter from Sir Morton, delivered by hand during the late afternoon, had some impelling influence on this change in her manner.

It must have been almost three o'clock before Slade finally dropped off into a heavy slumber that was not entirely restful.

At almost that precise instant the phone beside Oscar Sharpoll's bed rang with strident clamor. Sharpoll turned over, raised his head, and swore with heart-felt meaning. The phone continued its racket.

He stretched out a hand and switched on a bedside table-lamp, and a pink glow suffused a snugly furnished apartment, with heavy maroon drapes at the windows.

"All right, all right," he growled, and picked the receiver up from its cradle.

"What the hell is it?" he shouted into the mouthpiece.

A voice he recognized instantly, and which sent a cold shiver coursing down his silk-covered spine, said in his ear, "Zou haf got to listen, my friend, an' listen ver' closely. Zou understand, *non?*"

Sharpoll's thoughts whirled in a vacuum, and for some moments he was bereft of speech.

"Zou understand?" demanded the voice with the French accent and the bitter intonation.

"*Oui* — damn you, yes!"

"Ver' good — zou listen. Listen good!"

The hand with which Sharpoll held the phone trembled, and he felt cold all over, as though a strong draught blew through the bedroom. Yet he knew the door was closed and the windows securely fastened.

"Tomorrow zou will draw two thousand pounds in one-pound notes — zou got that?"

"I'll see you in hell first! It's blackmail!"

"It's death, my friend, if zou refuse my request. Onderstand zat."

"Request!"

"Exactly. Zou will take zese notes, wrapped in brown paper and placed in an — how zou say? — suitcase, *oui*. Zou will take it to Blackfriars Underground station. Zou will wear a yellow carnation in ze buttonhole."

Years of sharp dealing gave the tormented man a ready come-back to that.

"Where the heck am I to get a yellow carnation, damn you?"

"At ze flower-shop at ze corner of ze road where zou live. Zey always haf ze yellow carnations."

Sharpoll gulped and ran the fingers of his left hand round his neck. The skin was damp to his touch, and the fact mildly shocked him.

"This is sheer madness," he growled. "Two thousand quid in singles, a yellow carnation, Blackfriars Underground station . . . damn it, it sounds like a blasted shocker."

"It will be a terrible shocker, as zou say, my friend, if zou do not comply wiz my request, exactly as I haf said, at twelve o'clock to ze minute."

"Twelve o'clock! But listen. I've got to get —"

"Twelve o'clock, my friend. *Douze heures!*"

"But —"

"An' no 'buts,' *mon ami*."

"*Mon ami* — you wretch!"

"Lastly, zou will give ze suitcase wiz ze money to ze person who taps zou three times on ze shoulder."

"Does it matter which shoulder?" Sharpoll asked, infusing some notes of sarcasm into his rasping voice.

"*Mais certainement.* Ze left shoulder, my friend. Zou will be saluted on ze left shoulder. Zou will do nothing except hand over ze suitcase, onderstand? Zou will not walk out of ze station. Zou will remain zere until a quarter past ze hour — until twelve-fifteen, *oui*. Zen zou may go freely where zou will."

"Thanks for nothing," Sharpoll muttered, rubbing his neck again. "And supposing I don't do all this blasted nonsense?"

A chill laugh rang against his ear.

"Zou will — if zou wish to sleep on disturbed in your own bed tomorrow night, *mon ami*."

The line went dead. Sharpoll shook the instrument, but no voice came back mockingly. He dropped the receiver in its cradle and climbed into bed. For some moments he sat upright, digging his fingernails into the silk sleeve of his pajama jacket.

"Two thousand quid, so that's the game. Hold me up to ransom. First Drumburgh — "

He gulped. A new thought had suddenly sprung unbidden into his mind, and it appalled him. His nails stopped scraping against the silk of his sleeve.

"Drumburgh! By God, maybe he shook him down for some coin! Maybe Drumburgh and the woman — maybe they both paid, and then *zim!* they're out, like a couple of tallow candles."

He sat up in bed experimenting with the idea, fascinated by it, and fresh shivers ran over him.

"An' maybe it's the same trick for me," he reflected aloud. "Only — only," he repeated, following his own thought very closely, "I don't fall for the general idea so easy. He sells me on Drumburgh, an' then removes Drumburgh, which means more trouble. Then he turns on me. But I'm not Drumburgh. The police have been along to see me an' they've made a lot of talk. Well, they can do something this time. They can make action, an' get cracking."

The idea pleased him, gave him assurance. He felt relieved and smiled at the footboard of the bed.

"Yellow carnation," he muttered. "Hell!"

He turned out the light and tried to compose himself to sleep, but he had difficulty in dozing. His telephone conversation had left him wide awake, and the thought that had come to him gave him joy that had to be savored by reflection.

It was possibly two hours later that Peter Burgoyne was wakened by a hand placed on his shoulder.

"What the — "

The hand shifted quickly to his mouth.

"I want to talk to you," said a voice.

Burgoyne was suddenly wide-eyed and staring at the intruder in the pale light of dawn filtering through the curtains.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Nevaire mind, *mon ami*."

"But I do mind — "

"Just listen."

"Your voice sounds a bit familiar, despite that atrocious accent, but if — "

"Quiet, I say!"

Burgoyne heard the note of menace and was quiet.

"I haf com' for ze picture. Zou will zen listen ver' carefully, an' if zou do what I say maybe we can com' to som' arrangement. Now don't be foolish an' try to start a fight, my friend. Zou haf no chance — "

"Your voice, I know, I — "

Again the hand clamped down over his mouth.



## CHAPTER XIX

### A TRAP IS SPRUNG

SHARPOLL WAS waiting for Slade when the latter arrived at Scotland Yard after breakfast.

"I've been waiting half an hour. I've news. I couldn't tell you over the phone, and you'll see how I'm ready to co-operate."

Slade eyed his visitor. Sharpoll seemed very pleased with himself. His eyes gleamed, and he rubbed his hands together, and he looked like a man who has gambled sixpence and made a thousand pounds. Which was something like the odds Sharpoll usually tried for, and possibly this was how he looked when one of his pieces of financial jugglery dropped the jackpot into his waiting hands.

"It's going to be an education—for me," Slade said mildly.

Sharpoll blinked at that, frowned for a moment, but his brow quickly cleared.

"You're a funny man, Superintendent. You like your little joke," he smiled.

Slade felt like saying, "I've got it, right in front of me," but desisted. Sharpoll had come well primed with something. If he kept the man waiting much longer there would be a risk of him bursting. Sharpoll was positively bubbling over with excitement.

"Well, let's leave it at that," he suggested. "You've got something to tell me. Information."

"I certainly have. I've come to offer myself as a decoy."

At the moment of making the offer there was a marked

similarity between the speaker and the object to which he referred. Sharpoll looked all set to paddle away placidly, as pleased as Punch with himself. The man was an entirely different creature from the suspicious, nimble-witted business man Slade had met previously.

"Well, now, Mr. Sharpoll, that's very nice of you. Any time I'm wanting a decoy, of course, I—"

"But you don't understand. You want me now."

"Now — this minute?"

"Not this minute precisely." Sharpoll sighed. "Of course you don't."

"Oh."

"But you will at twelve o'clock."

"Twelve o'clock?"

"Naturally. In Blackfriars Underground."

It was warm in the room, and when he had entered Slade had opened the window. But the warmth of the room could not be entirely responsible for this seemingly distract form of conversation in which the normally cold-blooded Oscar Sharpoll was engaging.

Slade looked at his visitor. The man seemed in earnest.

"So I want you as a decoy duck in Blackfriars Underground at twelve o'clock."

"Exactly."

"Why?"

"To wear a yellow carnation, of course."

"H'm. You got the carnation, I take it? A yellow one, I mean."

"No, but I've ordered it. I tell you, I've been nippy this morning. Haven't let any grass grow under my feet."

"You won't have to bother about that in Blackfriars Underground."

"Huh?"



Sharpoll sat back, surprised, for the first time a trace of suspicion in his manner.

"You wouldn't be making fun — "

Slade hastily forestalled what was coming.

"Look," he said, "to save this conversation becoming a low grade of music-hall patter, you tell me from the beginning what it's all about. I've an idea you're going to meet someone in Blackfriars Underground, and the words decoy duck suggest to me that you think I should do something about apprehending this person."

"But of course."

"Who is the person?"

"Monsieur Hirondelle."

It was Slade's turn to look surprised. He obliged, and Sharpoll guffawed like a carthorse with a sore larynx.

"Thought that would fetch you. Damn me if I didn't."

Slade recovered rapidly.

"And the witching hour is noon?"

"Today," Sharpoll insisted.

"And how have you managed to fix all this so neatly?" Slade inquired. "You've read this morning's papers?"

"I have. I know the last editions have that story about you and a bandaged man having a scrap somewhere in — Paddington, was it?"

"It was — very much in Paddington."

"Yes, well, I can't claim the credit for knowing that and doing something about it, Superintendent. But about three o'clock this morning, while I was sound asleep, the phone rings. It's the Frenchie, and he's got a nasty accent. It sounds putrid at three in the morning. He wants money, two thousand quid in singles — "

"I see. You're taking it to Blackfriars Underground and delivering it there. How about the bank?"

"I've been on to the manager. He'll have the money ready by half-past eleven. I'm calling for it then and going on to the — er — rendezvous."

"So you're going through with it?"

"Through with it? Of course. Look what happened to Drumburgh."

Sharpoll seemed to resent any suggestion that he was not going through with the arrangement he had made over the telephone in the small hours.

"I see. You think there's a parallel? I mean, you think this Frenchman would kill you if you didn't turn up with the money?"

"He said he would. And in all my dealings with him so far he's been as good as his word. I know that, and it's enough for a man who usually doesn't want telling twice, Superintendent."

"And what do you think will happen when you do meet him and he's arrested?"

"Nothing. It'll be too late. Besides, as soon as your chaps start doing their stuff I make myself scarce — damned scarce, in case he starts blowing off with a gun. I'm no blasted hero. But I've no use for a man who goes round threatening to kill me unless I give him what he wants. That's high time the law's allowed to earn its keep, as I see things, anyway."

Slade smiled grimly at this piece of self-exposure.

"Very well, so you want us to cooperate to capture the mysterious Monsieur Hirondelle — "

"Cooperate!" Sharpoll sounded nettled. "I should think you'd be damned glad to have the chance to get your hands on him, after what I've read. Damn it, I must say you're taking things calmly."

Slade kept his temper with difficulty.

"Mr. Sharpoll," he said, "considering the reluctance with which you availed yourself of the opportunity to help us a few

days ago I'm surprised at this change in you."

Sharpoll grunted, and looked down his nose.

"Furthermore," Slade added, "the fact that you find me taking things calmly I do not accept as a reproof. And again I—"

But he wasn't allowed to go on. Sharpoll waved a fleshy hand and looked up.

"All right, I was a bit hasty, but this thing's got under my skin, Superintendent. You must make allowances. We're not all so case-hardened as you."

Slade took private leave to doubt that. But he gestured in acceptance of the other's half-apology.

"Very well. Now let's see what we can do about setting a trap for our friend. How will you know him? He will see you, of course, and recognize you by the yellow carnation."

"Right. Then he comes up to me and taps me three times on the left shoulder. That's the signal. I hand over the bag of dough to whoever does that."

"And that will be the mysterious Frenchman?"

"Of course. He threatened me. It's plain he got Drumburgh."

"What if he tries to tie you up with what has happened?"

Oscar Sharpoll sat back and clasped his hands. He did not smile, but without doing so managed to look pleased with himself.

"That would be his word against mine. Further, Superintendent, I don't think he'll try to drag me in."

"No?"

"No. I can make things very difficult if I talk."

"You will of course."

Oscar Sharpoll played his trump.

"Then it would be merely my word against his. Not very good, eh? Think what a smart counsel could do with me on

the stand. My hearing's only normal, and no normal man could stand up to a smart counsel who's trying to get him about voices only heard over the phone. No, I don't think I'm going to be very useful one way or the other, Superintendent. You may as well make your mind up to that."

Slade could cheerfully have got up and punched the man's assured face. But he knew that Sharpoll was right. Men like Sharpoll usually were when it became a matter of looking after their own skins. Years of self-protection had given them a technique which was well-nigh unassailable from a purely legal standpoint.

Slade threw in his hand. He saw that it would be sheer waste of time trying to pin down Sharpoll. The man had come along with his fine gesture only because he had worked out very accurately just where he was placing himself and was satisfied that he stood in no personal danger of running foul of the law. Doubtless he had got his lawyer out of bed early and made him do some rapid thinking. Sharpoll and his kind were hard on lawyers.

"Well, we won't argue," he told his visitor. "Everything depends on this business at Blackfriars Underground. If it doesn't come off — "

But Sharpoll, having gone so far, was not prepared to consider failure.

"It will," he maintained stoutly. "He wants that money. He'll be there, and I'll let him have it. But by heck if you let him slip through your fingers with my cash, Superintendent — "

The thought made him take a deep breath and cross mental fingers.

Slade felt happier when he saw the change in Sharpoll. "Quite a risk you're taking, isn't it, backing the law?"

"Bah!" Sharpoll said, and got to his feet. "I'll ring you from the bank. So long."

He went out. Slade pressed a buzzer button, and Windrop came in. He explained to the Chief Inspector the position as outlined by his recent guest. Windrop threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Pardon me, sir," he grinned, returning to an upright posture, "but this is something for the record. After all the chasing we've done, in walks Oscar and . . . . Decoy duck! He can't have a sense of humor, or he'd explode with his own farce."

Slade nodded. "Well, you can take it from me, Windrop, he's still in one piece. Still in one big solid chunk that's going to remain a pain in our necks for years. But just now we can't do anything except follow his lead. I know how you feel about it. I feel worse. But there it is."

"I know," Windrop said, screwing his face up in a puzzled frown, "but why the dickens does he want to take a bag of real money? That's what beats me. It's not like him, I should say."

Slade shook his head. "I don't agree with you there, Windrop," he said slowly. "Sharpoll's slippery as a greased eel. If something did go wrong, he'd be able to shout the odds all over London, how he helped Scotland Yard, lost his money doing so, and all that line of stuff. Looking at it damned meanly, it could be an investment of sorts. Sharpoll doesn't find himself allied with us very often. Now he does, he's making the most of it, dramatizing the setup, and — to his mind — that means using real money. Which only goes to prove how the slickest of them has a kink somewhere."

"A kink!" Windrop laughed again. "Why, after this, I don't believe there's a con man in London who couldn't take him for the fastest ride of his sweet natural."

Then they got down to planning the trap they were to spring at mid-day. By eleven-fifteen Clinton and half a

dozen plain-clothes men had been detailed by Windrop to cover the station and its subway approaches and to be prepared to make the arrest.

Five minutes later, at eleven-twenty, a call came through from Paris. Slade had a police clerk take down notes of the conversation from an extension fitted with a set of headphones.

The information offered him was interesting and definitely constructive from his point of view.

The Grenoble police had made further inquiries and had traced a member of the Maquis who was believed to be an Englishman. He was a Monsieur Jean Briand. He had come to the district many years before, and was apparently of independent means. He had lived in a house in the village of La Petitotte, and in time the villagers had come to accept him as one of themselves, and had even forgotten that he was not a Frenchman. He had sketched and painted, but of late years had been seen little with a paint brush or sketch pad. When the Hun had overrun France he was one of the first to take to the mountains and live the hard life of a partisan. In the records of the F.F.I. the name of Jean Briand ranked with the bravest. He had proved a leader of outstanding ability and his courage had become a byword with the men who had served under him. Time and again he had been responsible for sabotaging the schemes of the German commander in the Grenoble district, and when the Hun had taken hostages some of the most daring rescue bids had been planned and carried out by the band of Resisters who obeyed the commands of Jean Briand.

However, a short while after D-Day Jean Briand was picked up by the R.A.F. at a secret landing field in the mountains, and he went to England with full details of the Maquis strength and dispositions in the Vosges. It was generally believed that his work was to coordinate the task of the F.F.I. in that region when General Patch and his Seventh Army landed in the South.

But Jean Briand did not return, though around Grenoble his name was still venerated, and when the evening glass was drunk men who had lived and fought by his side still toasted him and mentioned his deeds with affection.

That was the sum total of the information. Grenoble had nothing to add about a Monsieur Henri Dulappe. Equally Monsieur Hirondelle remained unknown to the people of the district.

Slade was about to ring off, after expressing his thanks, when the Paris official exclaimed with excitement. Apparently he had found among his notes one additional item of information that had escaped his notice. This Jean Briand had come to La Petitotte in the spring of 1921, and it was generally supposed that he had come for his health. He had lived previously in Paris, and was unmarried. At any rate, no one had ever seen a Madame Briand or heard him mention such a lady. In fact, Jean Briand, for the first ten years of his life in the village, had been something of a misogynist, but had later mellowed. Monsieur le Superintendent would understand.

Slade intimated that he understood all right, and the Sureté official hung up.

His phone rang almost immediately.

"There's a Mr. Sharpoll trying to get through to you, sir," he was informed. "He's been getting a bit excited—"

"I bet he has," Slade grinned. "Put him through."

Sharpoll came through in character, bellowing.

"What the devil's the matter with you people at Scotland Yard?" he wanted to know. "It's twenty to twelve, and I've—"

"No time to waste. I understand," Slade cut in smoothly. "I was on the line to Paris. Now, everything set, the money, the carnation? My men are on their way, and will follow the man to whom you give the suitcase and arrest him when clear of the subway entrance. Understand? We don't want any

nonsense about jumping on the line or anything like that."

"Suicide! My God, I hadn't thought of that! If he . . . You mean, he might try to get me down on the platform and then shove me under a train? Hell, that's a cheerful sendoff! Why the heck — "

"It's eighteen minutes to twelve," Slade reminded him. "Good luck."

He hung up, then rang through to the room where his clerk had taken notes on the Paris talk.

"Did you get it all, Johnson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Three copies. I'd like them by two o'clock."

"Very good, sir."

Slade picked up his hat and coat, and left the building. He crossed the Embankment and climbed on to the first tram going towards Charing Cross. It was four minutes to twelve when he alighted at Blackfriars Bridge. A stream of traffic from New Bridge Street and Queen Victoria Street held him up for a minute. Then he crossed to the subway entrance to the Underground. He recognized the plain-clothes man smoking a cigarette at the bottom of the steps. When he met the man's gaze the man stared straight through him.

He saw Sharpoll standing at the end of the stone corridor, by the steps leading to the ticket office and turnstiles. The man had a large yellow carnation in his buttonhole, and carried a medium-sized attaché-case with the initials O. S. large upon the side.

Sharpoll was smoking a cigarette rapidly, and he looked nervous. It was plain that he was going no nearer to the turnstiles leading to the platform than he had to; his brief talk with Slade over the phone had decided him against taking unnecessary risks.

Slade was standing by the exit leading to Queen Victoria

Street and the Southern Railway when he heard the booming notes of St. Paul's chiming the hour. The hour was still striking when a figure muffled up in an overcoat, and wearing a white bandage round its head, entered the subway from the Embankment entrance. Pausing to give one hurried glance round, the newcomer espied the carnation, and hurried forward. He came up behind Sharpoll, tapped the man three times on the left shoulder, and Sharpoll started so violently that he all but dropped the bag. The newcomer snatched it and made for the New Bridge Street exit. Slade looked across at Sharpoll and saw that the man was quivering in every limb, and he guessed what was in his mind.

Now that he had surrendered it, two thousand pounds seemed an awful lot of money to release for the pleasure of playing decoy. Slade doubted very much whether Oscar Sharpoll would ever make a similar gesture to Scotland Yard, even if his neck depended on it.

Five minutes passed, then Clinton came up to Slade.  
"We've got him in a car in John Carpenter Street. You're going to get a shock."

Slade looked hard at the sergeant.

"A hell of a shock," Clinton promised.

And Clinton was right. When Slade climbed into the police car parked in John Carpenter Street, and looked at the man whose right wrist was handcuffed to the left wrist of a plain-clothes man, he said, "What the hell!"

The eyes staring at him from between the folds of the bandage were the eyes of Peter Burgoyne, and that should have been impossible!

It was worse than impossible — it was absurd!

## CHAPTER XX

### STRANGE EXPLANATION

SLADE SAID NOTHING on the way back to Scotland Yard. He had too much to think about. After his wrist had been freed Burgoyne sat very still in the car, rubbing his knuckles and glowering at the Embankment wall as it flowed past the travelling car like a ribbon of granite.

Clinton ushered Burgoyne along corridors towards Slade's room. Slade turned round.

"Take that damned bandage off, Burgoyne," he said sourly, "and get ready to talk. You've taken two thousand pounds from a man by trickery. That's an indictable offence." The Yard man tapped the suitcase. "You've also impeded officers of the law in the proper exercise of their duty. Maybe you've let a triple murderer get away. Your cup's overflowing, young man."

Burgoyne looked round the room sheepishly.

"I suppose you think I'm a damned fool —"

"Stop that line of talk," Slade told him brusquely. "I'm not concerned with whether you're a fool. But I am with whether you're a crook. And don't waste your time — and mine — supposing what I think. There's no percentage in that. Let's have it straight at the start. Why did you pull this gag?"

"I don't know what you mean by gag."

"Don't try fencing, my boy. It's too late. You took someone's place. Why?"

"Well," Burgoyne said reluctantly, "I had to."

"H'm. Not very explicit. Can you enlarge?"

The door opened. Windrop came in silently and dropped

into a chair near the window. Burgoyne gave him a doubtful glance before replying.

"I can, but you're going to think I'm mad. It must have been about five o'clock this morning when someone woke me up. I was sleeping at Craven Court. My — er — half-sister..."

He hesitated. Slade glanced at Windrop. The latter nodded slowly.

"Yes, your half-sister what?" Slade prompted.

"She insisted that I stay in the house. I didn't want to. I don't like her mother, and I don't trust that secretary wallah — Terrington. Anyway, as I said, about five o'clock this morning I was roused when someone put a hand over my face. I looked up, and leaning over the bed was a man with a bandaged face. He started talking in broken English with a French accent. But that didn't fool me."

Slade glanced at him keenly.

"What do you mean, didn't fool you? Did you recognize him, then?"

"Of course. Do you think I'd have done this crazy thing if it hadn't been that he really wanted helping out of a jam?"

Slade stared at Windrop. Windrop looked at Clinton, who shrugged his shoulders and turned the palms of his hands outwards.

"Look," Slade said, "you got us all hanging on your words, Burgoyne. Do you mind telling us who this man with a bandaged face and a French accent is?"

Burgoyne stared.

"Mean to say you don't know?" he asked, surprised.

Windrop whistled through his teeth and crossed one leg over the other, and then became fixedly interested in the branches of a tree that waved outside the window. Clinton folded his arms and pursed his mouth, and began rocking himself gently to and fro, as though swayed by a great silent wind.

Slade stood very still. "Please," he said in a small voice, "tell us."

"Then you don't know!" Burgoyne's surprise was more apparent. He laughed, but stopped abruptly.

"No, we don't know," Slade whispered.

"It's Knowles!"

For a moment there was a strange, uncanny silence in the room.

Then Clinton was on his feet with a rubber-like bounce, and protesting.

"Impossible. Knowles was burned to death in the fire."

"That's what we've heard," Windrop agreed.

"I saw the body," Clinton maintained. "The bits of clothes were Knowles' all right."

Slade still looked at Burgoyne. The young man's face was flushed. His eyes were extra bright.

"Well, what have you got to say to that?" he inquired in a normal voice.

"Only this—it was Knowles."

Clinton threw up his hands and sat down again. Windrop uncrossed his legs and pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers.

"You'd swear to that, Burgoyne?"

"On a stack of Bibles a hundred feet high."

Slade looked around. "He seems sure, doesn't he?" he remarked. Windrop nodded, Clinton contented himself with a baleful glare.

"All right, then," Slade said. "Now let's—"

That was as far as he got before the phone rang insistently. He picked up the receiver, and asked, "Who is it? I'm busy." There was a brief pause, then he said, "Oh, put him through."

Two or three minutes passed while Slade held the receiver to his ear and listened to what someone was telling him. Oc-

casionally he interrupted the speaker at the other end of the line to inquire, "You're sure of that?" or "You've proof?" and from what the others in the room could judge he was always answered in the affirmative.

At last Slade put down the phone.

"That was Duckbott, calling from Salchester," he told the others. "Murchison's been on to him. The body of the man who died in the fire has now been identified as that of a night watchman who was thought to be off duty. A man of Knowles' height and build. And his clothes were Knowles'. It's pretty certain he was murdered, and he was left there to be burned and later identified as Knowles. Bit grim, but it bears out what Burgoyne has told us. Furthermore, it explains the bandage round Knowles' face. He got his face scorched in the heat of the fire before he could get clear, and he used picrid acid to take the pain out of his scorched cheeks. I saw some of the yellow stain on the bandages. Which is all right as far as it goes. But we are left, Burgoyne, wondering just why you changed roles with him. You knew what you were doing, didn't you?"

Peter Burgoyne was sitting very still, no longer rubbing his wrist.

"I didn't know what you've just told me," he said softly. "I didn't know. He told me he had to get some money that was due to him, and he couldn't go himself. He was in a jam. Over a woman, he said. First he wanted to talk about the picture of my mother. He wanted to see it again."

"Again?" Slade queried sharply.

"He saw it in my room in Salchester, and seemed taken by it. Of course, I didn't realize then that Drumburgh and she — I mean . . . ."

But he found difficulty in making his meaning clear, and contented himself with shaking his head.

"He showed more than normal interest in the picture?"

"Very much so. He was—well, obsessed I was going to say, and I don't think the word's too strong. Yes, he seemed obsessed by it. I remember in Salchester he couldn't take his eyes off it. He asked me lots of questions, and seemed hardly to believe me when I said I knew nothing about the picture or who had sent it to me—or even why."

"You liked Knowles?"

"I felt sympathetic towards him. I can't tell you precisely why. But there was something about him that demanded sympathy, in some way. Something beaten, as it were. I'm putting this badly. Perhaps I mean beaten out of him. Yes, that's nearer the truth. He was negative . . . his human value was negative."

Clinton coughed. The talk was getting over his head, and he was prepared to admit it. Windrop sat with a half-smile curving his pursed mouth.

"I shouldn't say the human value of any man was negative when he had murdered three fellow-humans," he remarked.

Burgoyne looked at him with wide, reflective eyes.

"So that's where you've all arrived," he remarked quietly, as though weighing his words in a mental balance. "Poor little Knowles the arch-crook, the murderer. The man who shot my father and mother and gave Betty Marsh a permanent quietus." He laughed on a note of strain. "And I felt sympathetic towards him—helped him." He paused, contemplated his hands moodily, and then glanced up with sharp defiance. "Damn it, I still feel sympathetic towards him—in some way. I loved my mother. I'd have given my life for her, and if anyone had ever told me that I'd have been in two minds about the man who killed her I'd have punched his face in. But—God help me!—I do. I—I—can't understand myself. It's all rather frightful," he ended slowly, his voice dropping.

Slade watched him for some moments without speaking.

"I can guess it isn't easy for you," he told the other. "You liked Knowles, felt drawn towards him, and you can't begin to hate him—"

But I don't *want* to hate him. Don't you see? I feel there must be some ghastly reason. I'm a chemist. Every minute I've spent tinkering with the laws of substance and change forces me to believe in a reason. I can't hate until I have that reason. I'm — can't you understand? — sort of suspended emotionally. Give me that reason, and maybe I'll hate deeply. Yes, I think I will. I remember how I felt earlier, the urge that made me come to London, the sense of striving against a colossal futility. Give me the reason."

He sat back in his chair, as though trying to force his spine through the red leather, almost crouching with expectancy.

Slade said, "Hate was the reason, Burgoyne. A deep hatred that had grown cancerous with the years. Perhaps jealousy was mixed with that hatred. Perhaps a thousand scraps of feeling and distorted emotion. Perhaps, too, frustration."

When he paused, Burgoyne frowned.

"You're talking in riddles," he accused.

"Not exactly," the Yard man said. "But I'm not being as explicit as I could because you demand reason, and reason is based upon concrete evidence. I haven't that evidence yet. I shall get it, though, never fear. But I want you to help in the details."

Burgoyne scrubbed his mouth with a hand that was not quite steady.

"Help in putting a rope around Knowles' neck," he said blankly.

Clinton stirred in his seat, and took a deep breath as though he had grown uncomfortable. Windrop glanced again at the branches waving over the Embankment.

Slade did not drop his gaze from the young man's face.

"Burgoyne," he said, "where is the picture?"

"I lent it to Knowles. He was insistent. He said he thought he could find out something for me about the subject and the artist. I didn't want to give it to him. But he scared me. I mean his manner scared me. It was intensive, urgent. He seemed like a man driven by some strange internal force. He told me I had to help him. He had no one else. He had to keep a rendezvous with a man who would be wearing a yellow carnation. It sounded like something out of a nightmare—"

"Don't be misled," Slade put in. "The F.F.I. were used to approaching people who wore code signs — flowers, handkerchiefs protruding from pockets, hats at a certain angle, brown shoes with black laces. Yellow carnations . . . not unusual."

"The F.F.I. — that French accent, then you mean —"

"I mean I'm sorry I interrupted you," Slade smiled. But Clinton, who had worked for years with him, knew that Slade had interrupted with a purpose, and he suspected that Slade's intention had been to settle a possible doubt in the young man's mind.

Burgoyne gave evidence of this.

"No," he said, fresh interest coloring his voice, "you're right. The Maquis. Knowles told me, months ago, that he had lived in France for years, and that he had been there when the war broke out. You know a lot more than you've told me, Superintendent," he said abruptly.

"Quite a bit. But it's still largely supposition and unjoined links. I haven't a chain of reason," Slade assured him.

"I see. Then —"

"I still want all the details you can supply me."

Burgoyne's head sank until his chin crushed his tie. He pursed his mouth, and ran a finger over his lips.

"I let him have the picture. I didn't want to. But, as I said,

there was something about him that made me feel damned sorry for him. I gave him the picture, and he promised to let me have it back in a couple of days. I also agreed to this seemingly hare-brained trick of deputizing for him at noon. I had misgivings — especially when he insisted that the muffling bandage was necessary — ”

“Did he mention Oscar Sharpoll?” Slade inquired.

“No.”

“Did he tell you what would be in the bag?”

“No. He just said I was the only person he could turn to in London. I asked him how he came to know I was staying in the house. That seemed, as I thought at the time, to take him back a bit. But his answer was reasonable enough. He said he had been told.”

“He didn’t say by whom?”

“No.”

“And you’re sure he didn’t mention the name Oscar Sharpoll? He didn’t say that Sharpoll had told him?”

“Not that I remember, and I’m pretty sure I remember what he said. No, he didn’t mention the name, Superintendent. Does it matter?”

“Not greatly,” Slade told him. “He didn’t say where he was staying in London, nor tell you where he was taking the picture?”

“No.”

“A man toting a picture round will be conspicuous,” Clinton said to the carpet.

“Add to that a bandage round his face,” Windrop remarked, still contemplating the branches.

“Wait,” Burgoyne said. “He had something woolen over his head. Something like a knitted balaclava helmet. He said it helped to keep the bandage in position.”

Slade nodded. “Good,” he said. “That’s a help. And you’re

sure he didn't mention money — that you were going to pick up two thousand pounds?"

"Not a word."

"Very well, then. When you had picked up this suitcase, what were you going to do with it?"

The question produced a blank stare from Burgoyne.

"Do with it? Why, nothing. Just keep it, I suppose, until he called for it."

"I see. So he didn't make any arrangement for picking it up?"

"No."

"And that didn't make you suspicious?"

"Look here, Superintendent," Burgoyne said, looking annoyed, "don't try to bamboozle me with tricky questions. Of course I was suspicious. I was suspicious the whole time he was there. But I don't know of what. Of him, I suppose, but not of any particular thing he said or did. Of the whole crazy setup. Yes, I was suspicious, if that's the right word. But if you mean was I afraid of him — afraid to do what he asked — then the answer's no. Not an unqualified no. I was very reluctant, but I did give way, and I felt, as I said, sympathetic to him."

Slade sat back.

"Thank you, Mr. Burgoyne. You've answered my question more fully than I had expected, I must confess." He smiled wryly. "Then it has never entered your head that Knowles has very cleverly put you in a position which could—I say could, mark you, not will—land you with a charge of murder?"

Burgoyne sat very still, thoughtful.

He said at last, "You mean he set a trap for me?"

"I do."

"And can you give me a reason for that?"

"Yes. The same. Hate. He hates you for what you are. For what you have been."

Burgoyne tried to work it out. He shook his head.

"I don't get it," he confessed. "Can you give me a clue?"

"That's funny," Slade said.

"How do you mean?"

"There is a clue. I can't give it to you. For the reason that you've given it away."

"I have?"

Slade nodded.

Then enlightenment came to Burgoyne.

"Oh, you mean the picture."

"Yes, I mean the picture," the Yard man said. "You got the picture in the first place merely because Knowles told someone to send it to you. Now don't say it sounds crazy. I know that. But it happens to be a fact. It was sent to you, I believe, for one reason. Knowles wanted it. You spoiled his chance of getting it by coming south with it, and he came after you. He has no intention of giving you back the picture."

Burgoyne stared at the speaker with narrowed eyes.

"Is this the supposition you mentioned a while back?" he asked.

"Some of it," Slade said.

As that moment the phone rang again. Slade picked up the receiver, and promptly exclaimed aloud.

"Smailey! What the hell are you up to?" he demanded.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MORE VIOLENCE IN MOONBY STREET

FOR ONCE IN HIS rather strained relations with the police force from which he had made a hurried exit some years before, Frederick Smailey felt pleased with himself. He came out of the telephone kiosk at the corner of the small passage at one end of Moonby Street and paused to light a cigarette. He drew the smoke into his lungs with relish. He felt he had been smart.

This, he assured himself, would be an eye opener for Anthony Slade. For the A.C., too, for Slade would talk. Yes, there'd be plenty of talk at the Yard when they got back there. That stuff in the newspapers about Slade's fight had only been given out because Slade was getting to the end of his tether. He was running round in circles, and here was he, Frederick Smailey, the man Slade had pushed around, waiting to hand over the man for whom three-quarters of the police in London and the Home Counties were searching.

It was definitely an occasion for Frederick Smailey. Most definitely.

He was smoking his second cigarette when the first police car nosed round the corner and came to a halt with a faint squeal of brakes.

Slade jumped out, followed by Clinton and Windrop, as the second police car swung behind the first.

"Let's have it, Smailey, and without any fancy trimmings. If you're right—"

"I'm right, all right," Smailey grinned.

"Well, start doing yourself some good," Slade advised him. Smailey took the implied criticism in good part.

"It's this way," he began. "Ever since you keel-hauled me after that visit to the office I felt I had to get myself straight with this thing. If Cashern was putting up a bluff and just using me to get my hands mucky instead of his I wanted to know. I wanted to know, too, just how China Bullman fitted into the business. He walks off with Sadie—oh, I know that little side issue! — and say what one likes, Sadie's been useful, and —"

"And she's kept her ears open." Slade smiled despite his impatience.

"She hasn't heard a lot she can do anything with. I've seen to that," Smailey said. "But, anyway, this thing began that night in Moonby Street —"

"It didn't. It began — oh, quite a while ago," Slade said. "But go on, I know what you mean."

Smailey's shrewd eyes became shrewder.

"I see," he said.

"I don't think so, Smailey," Slade said. "But don't let it bother you. Go right on with your tale. This thing, you were saying, began that night here in Moonby Street. Well?"

"Remember I told you about the taxi pulling up, and then China coming up to me? Well, I've thought about that several times. I've taken the trouble to find out who lives in the house. An American. A Professor Kindermart."

"I could have told you that, Smailey."

The private detective nodded.

"I dare say," he said. "But I didn't like the idea, somehow, of Bullman being around —"

"Bullman isn't the killer."

"I'm not going to spill many tears over that, and, as for me, I don't know whether he is or he isn't. But I got the hunch I'd

learn more by watching Kindermart's house than I would sitting in the office trying to puzzle out how Cashern and Sharpoll have made a mug out of me, sending pictures to Salchester, and—”

“All right, skip the personal background stuff,” Slade said. “You watched the house. When?”

“Most of these past two days. Things have been cooking. The explosion and fire near Salchester. That knockabout you got into. Oh, I've got my own way of taking bits out of different pages of the newspaper and making a little story of my own.”

“Sounds all right,” Slade said non-committally. “You might try journalism. It's got angles.”

“So's a polygon,” Smailey said rudely, “and I don't like polygons.”

“I'll remember that,” Slade grinned. “What's the angle here?”

“About”—Smailey consulted his watch—“twenty minutes ago a taxi drew up at Kindermart's, and a man got out. He had a square brown-paper parcel. Just about the size of that picture I sent to Salchester.”

Smailey paused to see how Slade and the others were taking this. They were stony-eyed, and said nothing.

“He hadn't got a hat on. But he had a sort of—well, what boys call pixie hoods—one of those, dark blue, over his head. As he turned to pay the driver I saw down the side of his face, under the dark blue of the woolen hood, a strip of white. It could have been a bandage. Find it of interest?” he asked.

“Very,” Slade said, without hesitation. “Smailey, if this is what I think it is, I'm liable to think some pleasant things about you. So don't get alarmed if your ears start burning and growing red.”

Smailey grinned.

“Thought this would raise a spot of enthusiasm, but I don't

know what it's all about, mind you. I just put two and two together after reading the papers — ”

“All right, you've got your alibi pat,” Slade assured him. “I'm not asking you to convince me that you haven't done anything you shouldn't have done — ”

“But damn it, I haven't!”

Slade's grin came back. “Hard, isn't it, Smailey, when you get misjudged? Better chalk it up to some time when you get away with — well, not quite murder.”

Smailey glowered. “That's all very well. Here am I — ”

“Wasting time,” Slade put in. “Go on, man. Let's have the rest of it. Do you know who this man in the pixie hood is?”

“No.”

“Are you very sure? Mark the very, Smailey.”

“So far as I know I've never seen him in my life before.”

“Not even when you've been hanging round that pub where Betty Marsh sometimes went?”

“No,” Smailey insisted, and Slade saw that he meant it.

“All right, go on, then,” the Yard man requested. “You said on the phone you had something that couldn't wait.”

“You're not fooling me, Slade,” Smailey said. “This is it. This can't wait, and I don't give a damn how straight you keep that poker face — nor Clinton and Windrop. That's the fellow you had the scrap with. I've been playing this sort of hunch for years. I know when I've picked the right one out of the bag before I unroll it. This is the right one, Slade. The man you had that fight with in Paddington is in that house, and I'd bet on it. I've read the description. It fits him. But there's only one thing that I don't get.”

“What's that?” Slade obliged.

“He talks with a French accent. At least, the taxi-driver says he does. I stopped the cab as it came back down the street, and asked the cabby, and he — ”

But Smailey was talking to himself. Slade had heard all that was necessary. He gave a short signal to the others and hurried to the first police car and jumped inside. Both cars leaped forward. Three mintues later, while a couple of men watched the front of the house, Slade, with Windrop and Clinton and another man, approached the rear. They passed the shed where Peter Burgoyne had concealed himself, and went up the stone steps down which Bullman had carried the tommy-gun the night Burgoyne watched him from the shed. The back door was opened by Windrop without making a sound. The Yard detectives crowded into a narrow hallway that linked the rear of the house with the front. They moved along the carpeted hall silently, and Slade, who was in the van, all but tripped over a step in the gloom.

They waited, but apparently no one save themselves had heard the sound of the Yard man's stumble, and while listening they caught the drone of a voice. It was a steady drone. The voice went on and on.

"Seems to come from upstairs. Probably the first floor," Windrop, next to Slade, whispered.

"Sounds like it," Slade agreed. "You and Clinton come up with me. Thompson," he said to the fourth man, "you remain at the bottom of the stairs, in case he gets past us. If you have to tackle him don't be shy. O.K.?"

"O.K., sir," the man nodded.

The other three moved along silently to the foot of a wide staircase, and Slade mounted, followed closely by Windrop and Clinton. There was now no mistaking the direction from which the voice came. It came from a room somewhere above them, and as they reached the first landing words became audible.

Clinton said, "It's not Kindermart, because he's an American, and that's not an American voice."

It was not. It was a high-pitched, shrill voice, threaded with emotional color, spoken by someone who was plainly nervous, highly strung, and very determined to win an argument. As the three men from Scotland Yard crept nearer to a door that stood half open the shrillness of the voice rose in pitch, like a steam whistle.

"Those," the unseen was saying excitedly, "are the papers missing from Lord Drumburgh's car, Professor. No, that other parcel has nothing to do with them. That is something else, a picture. It is mine. But these papers, Professor, they are what you want. Sharpoll and Cashern are not the men with whom you must treat. They have nothing. They are merely the empty echoes of what I have told them. They cannot help you. I can. I can arrange — What was that?" the speaker broke off.

The detectives outside the room held their breath.

A voice with a noticeable transatlantic accent said, "You're very jumpy, Mr. Swallow. And really there's no need to keep that gun pointed at me. If you don't trust me — "

"I don't trust anyone, Professor. You must forgive the seeming lack of faith in you. But either you agree to my proposal or I must deal elsewhere, and that would mean that I could not afford to leave you as a witness."

"I see."

"Only partly — "

"Excuse me, Mr. Swallow, but there's something you don't know."

"Well?" The voice was pitched even higher now. It was almost a subdued scream.

"I had no intention of dealing finally with Sharpoll. I know something of his reputation. But it suited both Drumburgh and myself to let him have his head — for a time, at any rate."

"So you mean you were really going to trade with Drumburgh?" the high pitched voice demanded.

By comparison the American's was calm and soothing.

"Naturally. Drumburgh and I understood each other. We were not financiers trying to scrape out of a barrel something that belonged to other people. We were interested, both of us, in evolving a commercial arrangement that would not impoverish one country at the expense of a second and to the profit of a third. We were anxious to avoid a commercial war. We were anxious to make the benefits of atomic energy applied to industrial uses as widespread and as cheap as we could make them. We saw the advantages of working together, and in secret. We were about to forge a new scientific and commercial link when he was murdered. So you can see, Mr. Swallow, you have largely been wasting your time. Even murdering Drumburgh was a waste of time. The arrangements were made. He was bringing me the papers the night he was killed — by you."

There was a strangely oppressive silence following upon the American's words. The Yard men hesitated to break into the room. They knew that inside the American was threatened by a man who was armed and who would have not the slightest hesitation in shooting to kill.

"You mean I have wasted my time in coming to you, Professor," the shrill voice went on, but this time it was not quite so high-pitched.

"I mean, Mr. Swallow, that much as those papers mean to me, I can't trade with them. I had a gentlemen's agreement with Drumburgh. I do not consider that agreement, which implied an understanding with the Drumburgh Trust, invalid because Drumburgh was murdered. My frank advice, Mr. Swallow, is for you to give me those papers and then leave."

"I can't do that. You must agree to trade with me or die, Professor. You are a man of perception. You must see that there is no alternative. You want these papers. Without them your gentleman's agreement means nothing — nothing con-

crete, I mean. The police are hunting for them. They won't find them. I can put back the development of atomic energy for industry months—perhaps years. And time is money, Professor. You know that. I can waste all that money by striking a match and holding them in its flame."

"Yes, you can do that, Mr. Swallow," said the American gravely, and those outside the room heard the note of alarm in his voice. "But I advise you not to. Most earnestly I advise you not to."

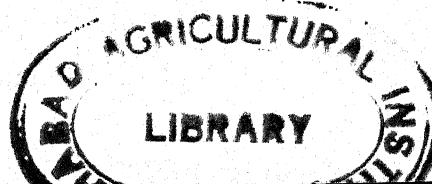
The high-pitched voice had dropped to a lower key when it spoke again.

"I believe you are merely talking to gain time, Professor. If you have any notion of winning my confidence, and then maneuvering to get to the phone or even out of the room and locking me in from the other side, I beg you to forget it. I am a man who has grown accustomed to dealing with emergencies demanding violence and sudden stratagems. I am a very wary man despite my apparent years and mien. I don't want to kill you, Professor, any more than I wanted to kill that little Marsh fool, but you know too much now—"

"I don't know why you killed Drumburgh and the woman."

There was a pause, broken when the high-pitched voice crackled again. "I discern your purpose, to keep me talking. To stop me from translating my resolve into violent action. A pity, Professor. I had not wanted a fortune. Ten thousand American dollars would have sufficed. American dollars are very marketable in France—in the France I know. I should have disappeared. I am offering you a bargain, Professor, one you will never get the like of again. Think of it. Ten thousand dollars, two thousand pounds, for something that certain foreign Powers would offer—"

"I am thinking, Mr. Swallow," said the American. "Thinking very hard. And I can't understand why you did it. You



didn't slay for two thousand pounds. Of that I'm sure."

"No," said the other, and again a perceptible lowering of the voice was discernible to the listeners on the landing. "No, I did not slay for money. Money would merely enable me to get away. In France I can lose myself again. I did it before, many years ago. I had all but forgotten. All but. And then the war brought me to England. I had to come. I had to bring facts and figures about the Underground Movement, and in England on every hand I saw pictures of Drumburgh, saw evidence of his great wealth, of the esteem in which men held him, and all my old-time hatred returned. I hated him with the hatred of accumulated years. I hated him because he had never used what he had stolen from me. So I remained in England. I probed and pried and learned what I wanted to know. And now they are dead, both of them, and their son will be in the hands of the police, unable to explain how he has robbed Sharpoll of two thousand pounds and what he has done with this picture. It has taken time, and I have had to play various parts, but in the years that have gone I have learned to play many parts. Only now . . . I am not sure whether I am glad or not. It is a terrible thing not to be glad about killing a man. When I killed a Nazi I was glad—always. I felt warm and tingling inside. It was exciting. But when I killed them I was cold. It was very different. And that silly Marsh girl who may have seen me leave the house, she was unlucky. Unlucky and stupid. I cried when I killed her. I couldn't help myself. If I have to shoot you, Professor, I shall be sorry. Very sorry. I don't like killing except when I hate. Hatred is something that burns and breeds a fiery energy in a man. Only sometimes I'm not sure if I can recognize true hatred. I don't hate you."

"Then don't kill me, Mr. Swallow. Of course, that isn't your name — "

"Of course not. But Sharpoll and Cashern knew me as Monsieur Hirondelle. And now, like the swallow, I must be leaving for a warmer clime. I beg of you, Mr. Kindermart, please make up your mind. Don't force me to shoot you merely to preserve my own liberty. I should be very sorry to have to do that."

The American said, "You're the strangest man I've ever met. Won't you show me your picture? I should like to see this painting by which you set such store."

"You would?" A tiny thread of bubbling excitement colored the answering tones. "You shall see her. She was beautiful, and when — "

The men outside heard him tearing paper, and Slade jerked his right arm forward. The three detectives broke into the room in a solid rush. The man by the table swung about, and from the face framed in the blue curve of a balaclava helmet two dark eyes flashed. Slade leaped for the hand holding the pistol. There was a flash and a roar, and dimly Slade was aware that something hard had smashed against the plaster of the ceiling, sending it down in a shower. Then he was tugging at the arm, and the man with whom he struggled grunted, "You again. I thought last night — "

But he did not finish. The breath was beaten from his threshing body by Clinton, who jumped in when he saw a chance to aid Slade. The arm on which Slade was trying to secure a firm lock wriggled free, and the steel automatic narrowly missed Slade's head.

Clinton stretched up a hand, but the man who had led them such a long chase was too quick. The gun eluded the sergeant's grabbing hand.

There was another roar, and the vitality began draining from the wild eyes. Clinton got to his knees, and stared at a round blob of bright fresh blood on the back of his hand.

Slade looked down at the man who was dying by his own hand. He was struggling to say something, and there was an unappeased hunger in his eyes.

"Let me see her," he demanded, gasping painfully. "I must see her."

Slade rose, and took from the table the picture he had first seen in Lord Drumburgh's study at Craven Court. He tore away the remaining pieces of brown paper covering the frame, and lifted the picture, so that the dying man's eyes could see it.

"Lottie . . . ."

A tiny smile dragged the paling lips into kinder expression. Some of the torrid heat left the smoldering eyes. The man looked pinched and old and, as Peter Burgoyne had said, beaten.

"Lottie . . . ."

His lips barely moved as he repeated the name. Slade bent down.

"Listen," he said, "you're dying. You've done enough harm. Will you sign a brief confession if I make one out? It's too late to undo what you've done, but there's her son."

The dying man winced.

"Her son," he murmured.

Will you sign?" Slade demanded.

The dark eyes looked at the Yard man.

"I'll sign — be quick. *Vite — vite!*"

The dark eyes closed. Slade gave the picture to Clinton, unscrewed his pen and produced a piece of paper. He scribbled a few lines quickly and again bent down over the man on the floor.

"Here you are," he said. "Sign here."

The man opened his eyes, stared at the paper for a moment, then nodded. "Help me," he murmured.

Slade placed an arm under the drooping shoulder and raised the man to a reclining position. His weight leaned heavily on

the detective. He took the pen from Slade and quickly scrawled his signature at the place where Slade's finger pointed.

After he had finished he remained looking at it for some seconds, then his eyes closed again, and Slade gently lowered the slack head.

The Yard man turned for the first time to the man who stood by the window. The American was a large-framed man with a curly mop of gray hair surmounting a wide, lined forehead. Pale blue eyes watched Slade thoughtfully.

"Professor Kindermart?" the Yard man inquired.

The American inclined his head. "Yes. I need hardly say your entry was highly opportune, and unexpected by both of us. It's all very tragic. You're from Scotland Yard?"

"Yes, I'm Superintendent Slade. I should be obliged if you would kindly witness this signature. You saw just now —"

"I saw," said the American quietly, "and heard. Yes, I will witness the signature, Superintendent. May I use your pen?"

"By all means."

Slade gave the American his pen. Kindermart moved to the table, on which Clinton had put the picture. For a moment he hesitated, staring at the picture which had meant so much to a number of people. Then he gave his attention to the brief confession and poised Slade's pen, preparatory to adding his own name.

"By heavens, Mr. Slade," he said, "it's the same name! Did you know?"

Slade met his quizzical gaze and nodded.

"Yes, I knew. I've known for several hours now."

"But —"

The American broke off, his forefinger tracing the signature of the artist in the corner of the picture. He traced the similar signature on the piece of paper. The ink in the blob at the end was still wet.